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ABSTRACT

Two public policy shifts in the past 10 years--the move from welfare to work and the end of social promotion in school--are intertwined in their implementation in the lives of working poor families. This report draws on ethnographic data from a 6-year study of working poor families in New York City over the period in which welfare reform became a reality, focusing on families' adaptations as adults increased work hours and as children responded to increased demands at school. Data collection methods included a survey of 900 Dominican, Puerto Rican, and African American families, 3 interviews with 100 families conducted over a 6-year period, and the daily monitoring of 12 families with 11 elementary-aged children and 3 preschoolers over 1 year. Findings illustrate three types of family adaptations: (1) monitoring children in school despite problems of poverty and illness by parents who know how and when to intervene and have significant others on whom to rely; (2) struggling parents who lack time flexibility, with older children pressed into taking responsibility for young siblings and children exhibiting behavior problems; and (3) parents who are unable to secure steady work, are overwhelmed by family demands, are in partnerships in which the wife is unable to enlist much help from the husband, and who are limited by their own educational limitations. The report finds that as parents are being told it is up to them to ensure that their children are prepared to take standardized tests, they are also being told they must put the financial support of their households first. Most of the families in this study have already made a trade-off between these two priorities and, with few exceptions, their children are paying some of the price. (Contains 31 references.) (KB)

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High Stakes:
Time Poverty, Testing
and the Children of the Working Poor

Margaret M. Chin
Katherine S. Newman

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High Stakes: Time Poverty, Testing and the Children of the Working Poor

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The purpose of the Working Paper Series is to share ideas and potential solutions about how all American families can meet the basic requirements for the healthy development of their children. Views expressed in this paper are those of the authors. Email: mmchin@hunter.cuny.edu

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Executive Summary

The United States has embraced two great policy shifts in the past ten years - one in welfare and the other in education - which were inspired by popular support for increased personal and institutional accountability. At one level, the two trends - insistence on work over welfare and an end to social promotion in school - were completely unrelated. They were brought about by different policy constituencies, inspired by wholly different research findings, and implemented by entirely different bureaucracies. At another level, they are intertwined, if not in their origins, then in their implementation in the private worlds of working poor households.

AS THE SCHOOLS NOW SEE IT, PARENTS CONSTITUTE EVER MORE INDISPENSIBLE PARTNERS IN MANAGING, MONITORING, AND SUPPORTING THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING.

As the schools now see it, parents constitute ever more indispensable partners in managing, monitoring and supporting their children's learning. Because teachers and administrators recognize the limits of what can be achieved in the classroom, parents have become, almost by fiat, an army of "home schoolers," enlisted in the task of pulling children over the hurdles created by high stakes tests. Meanwhile, welfare reform and the demands imposed by the increased costs of living in major American cities have pulled poor and low-income parents in the opposite direction: toward more hours committed to the workplace and the scramble to earn an adequate living. The combination of the two demands is leading many working poor families into a pressure cooker environment of competing demands on their time which have proven difficult even for middle-class, dual worker households to manage.

MEANWHILE, WELFARE REFORM AND THE DEMANDS IMPOSED BY THE INCREASED COSTS OF LIVING IN MAJOR AMERICAN CITIES HAVE PULLED POOR AND LOW-INCOME PARENTS TOWARD MORE HOURS IN THE WORKPLACE AND THE SCRAMBLE TO EARN AN ADEQUATE LIVING.

LOW-INCOME FAMILIES ARE BURDENED BY INADEQUATE INCOME (DESPITE LONG WORK HOURS), IRREGULAR SHIFTS, OVERCROWDED SCHOOLS, AND UNEVEN QUALITY IN AFTER SCHOOL CARE – PRESSURES MORE AFFLUENT, MIDDLE-CLASS FAMILIES ARE SPARED.

Low-income families are burdened by inadequate income (despite long work hours), irregular shifts, overcrowded schools, and uneven quality in after school care - pressures that more affluent, middle-class families are thankfully spared[1]. Parents who are themselves poorly educated, low on literacy, and non-English speaking are not well positioned to assist their children in learning to read or mastering their multiplication tables. Education reform aimed at greater accountability in school has magnified the impact of

[1] Jody Heymann (2000), in The Widening Gap, found that the time squeeze was problematic for all children, but it was acute for low-wage workers and had more serious consequences for their children.

cognitive skills among parents because of the reliance on them to monitor children's homework and reinforce basic skills. And the consequences of student failure have grown larger: mandatory summer school and holding children back in grade level.

There is certainly a positive case to be made for these goals, whatever one may think of the means. Parents who work are better able to support their families, have greater opportunities for advancement in the labor market, and generally embrace the chance to spend time among other adults (Newman 1999; Danziger, Corcoran, Danziger, and Heflin 2000). On the school side, the prospect of closing the gaps in educational attainment that have opened up between poor and minority children compared to working class, middle-class, and majority children is certainly a laudable objective. To the extent that the pressures generated by high stakes tests increase the school system's attention to "time on task" and promotes the mastery of grade level material before moving on to more complex ideas, they may well be good reason for them. However, there is a serious downside that must be borne in mind, particularly when we consider how these two policy directions clash in the lives of real families. Parents who are working more hours find it very difficult to take on the role that the schools are handing them: educational coach and adjunct teacher. And children who fail the tests and find themselves held back are at significant risk for educational failure, particularly dropping out of school altogether as our literature review explains.

PARENTS WHO ARE WORKING MORE HOURS FIND IT VERY DIFFICULT TO TAKE ON THE ROLE THAT THE SCHOOLS ARE HANDING THEM: EDUCATIONAL COACH AND ADJUNCT TEACHER.

It is also likely that these educational reforms will add to the problems that segregated schools already face. Gary Orfield and Mindy Kornhaber (2001) have demonstrated that segregation by race and income in schools has increased over the last decade, to the detriment of poor minority children. They are more likely to go to school with other minorities, a high proportion of poor classmates, and be taught by less qualified teachers. We cannot be certain how "ending social promotion" will add to these difficulties, but if the numbers were substantial, we are headed for trouble. Kids held back will not be randomly distributed throughout big city school systems. They are going to end up coming from schools that are already in trouble, compounding racial and income

KIDS HELD BACK WILL NOT BE RANDOMLY DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT BIG CITY SCHOOL SYSTEMS.

segretation with concentrations of children who are beyond the normative age for their grade.

PUBLIC SCHOOL IS INTENDED TO BE ONE OF THE GREAT EQUALIZERS IN A STRATIFIED SOCIETY.

Public school is intended to be one of the great equalizers in a stratified society, for it removes children from the influence of inequalities "at home" and subjects them to a more uniform learning environment in school. There is truth to this proposition even though there are inequalities among schools in terms of classroom resources, teacher preparation, physical plants, and racial segregation. Bringing children from disparate backgrounds together, and exposing them to a common curriculum helps to diminish, though clearly not eradicate, the significant differences between them that predate their entry to kindergarten.[2] Even so, the ways in which the playing field remains uneven are significant and not attributable solely to inequalities between schools.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE OR LACKING AT HOME, PARTICULARLY IN TERMS OF PARENTAL INPUTS, CONTINUE TO EXERT A SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE OVER PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL.

Resources available or lacking at home, particularly in terms of parental inputs, continue to exert a significant influence over performance in school. This paper traces the ways in which that connection may be tightening under the twinned policies of welfare reform and of high stakes testing. This is a story of inter-generational transmission of inequality. Families who can put the time or resources into helping their kids over educational hurdles will position the next generation to do well in school, and those who cannot will see their kids held back, or drop out. We will argue that increasing the number of hours that working poor parents - particularly single mothers - spend in the workplace, is having a negative impact on their capacity to help their children over the increasingly challenging hurdles of early elementary school.

This paper draws on ethnographic data from a six-year study of working poor families in New York City, spanning the period in which welfare reform became a reality. A survey of 900 families - 1/3 Dominican, 1/3 Puerto Rican, and 1/3 African American - followed by ethnographic interviews with 100 of these subjects three times over a six-year period

[2] Sara Vecchiotti (2001) notes that even among Kindergarten programs, there is no one consistent program or curriculum across the nation.

(1995-2001), forms the data base for this project.[3] Table I (page 53) presents the demographic characteristics of the New York survey and the qualitative sample.

OUR STUDY HAS OPENED A WINDOW ON THE DIFFICULT ADAPTATIONS FAMILIES ARE MAKING AS ADULTS INCREASE THEIR WORK HOURS, AND AS CHILDREN RESPOND TO THE INCREASED DEMANDS OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

We followed twelve families on a daily basis for a year and it is this third, most intimate source of data that has proven particularly revealing. Our study has opened a window on the difficult adaptations families are making as adults increase their work hours, and as children respond to the increased demands of the school system. Hence, after reviewing national and city-based data on school performance of low-income children, we turn to these twelve families for a deeper understanding of how changes in both domains are experienced on the home front.

The National Picture

WE HAVE LONG KNOWN THAT CHILDREN IN POOR FAMILIES ARE AT RISK FOR EDUCATIONAL FAILURE.

We have long known that children in poor families are at risk for educational failure. The differences are evident at very young ages. Children in high poverty neighborhoods arrive at the schoolhouse with serious deficits already in place. National data tell us school readiness differs dramatically by socio-economic status. Zill and West reported their findings in Condition of Education (COE) 2000 from a new source of data on young children – the U.S. Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (henceforth, ECLS-K).[4]

ECLS-K shows that a significant number of children arrive on the door of the kindergarten with significant gaps in "kid capital," the cultural knowledge that more advantaged children bring to the classroom as contextual understandings that make it much easier to move forward. Almost one-fifth (18%) are unfamiliar with the conventions of print: they do not know that English print is read from left to right and top to bottom or know where a story ends. Thirty-four percent cannot identify letters of the alphabet by name, which

[3] A final followup study is underway in 2002.
[4] In the Fall of 1998, trained assessors conducted standardized assessments with about 19,000 children to form a national probability sample of kindergartners attending 940 public and private schools. Ninety-five percent of these children were in kindergarten for the first time. This second group is the focus of the essay reported in the Condition of Education 2000.

indicates that they are not yet at the first level of reading proficiency.

Forty-two percent cannot count to 20 objects, or read more difficult single-digit numerals, and judge the relative lengths of several rod-like objects; though, most of these pupils (thirty-six percent) can count to 10 and read easier numerals. Six percent cannot count to 10 objects and identify simple numerals and shapes; which means they are not yet at the first level of mathematical proficiency.

The distribution of these deficiencies is hardly random. Age, gender and family background characteristics affect children's skills and knowledge. Children with below average skills entering kindergarten tend to have: a mother with less than a high school education (Zill 1996a); a family that received food stamps or cash welfare payments (Zill, Collins, West and Germino-Hausken 1995); a single-parent as head of household (Dawson 1991; Entwisle and Alexander 1995; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Zill 1996b); and/or parents with a primary language other than English (Kao 1999; Rumberger and Larson 1998).

THESE FINDINGS INDICATE THAT THE EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS THAT CHILDREN IN POOR FAMILIES ENCOUNTER ARE NOT SIMPLY A REFLECTION OF THE SCHOOLS THEY ATTEND, BUT OF THE INEQUALITIES IN PARENTAL AND FAMILY RESOURCES THAT CHARACTERIZE THEM BEFORE THEY EVEN GET TO THE SCHOOL-HOUSE DOOR.

Children living in big cities (with populations over 250,000) were far more likely to have one or more of these risk factors (Zill and West 2000) as were kindergartners from minority backgrounds. Thirty-eight percent of Hispanic, 44% of Black, and 44% of Asian Kindergarten children had at least one risk factor as compared to 23% for Whites. Over 71% of the White children have no risk factors (Zill and West 2000: figure 9, page xxxii). These risk factors are predictive of school performance: nearly half of those with multiple risk factors score in the bottom quartile in early reading and mathematics skills and general knowledge. Hence it comes as little surprise that children who have one or more of these characteristics have difficulty in school (Pallas, Natriello, and McDill 1989).[5] These findings are significant, because they indicate that the educational problems that children in poor families encounter are not simply a reflection of the schools they attend (Kozol 1991),

[5] Not all children with these risk factors do poorly, but they are prone to poor achievement (Kaufman and Bradby 1992).

but of the inequalities in parental and family resources that characterize them before they even get to the schoolhouse door.[6]

New Standards

Given these inequalities, it is safe to assume that children from disadvantaged backgrounds will be the ones most likely to have trouble with standardized tests and other measurement devices intended to assess academic competence. In New York City, rigorous standards have been set for each grade level. It is instructive to review what those standards consist of, using the first year experience of Kindergarten as an example. By the end of the academic year, Big Apple Kindergarten students are expected to demonstrate mastery of basic concepts of arithmetic and numbers, including an understanding of fractions using words like "half" and "quarter." They must recognize geometric shapes, use non-standard measure (cubes or strings) to measure length, know how to compare objects based on size, participate in collecting and recording data by tallying or surveying. Heavy emphasis is placed on developing reading habits, even in the Kindergarten year. Children are supposed to understand books that are read to them; imitate the reading behavior of their teachers; demonstrate that they understand the meaning of what they have heard by "retelling a story in their own words;" recognize the "print/sound code"; and be able to use letters and drawings to communicate.[7]

IN NEW YORK CITY, RIGOROUS STANDARDS HAVE BEEN SET FOR EACH GRADE LEVEL.

A BATTERY OF TESTS IN THIRD GRADE WILL DETERMINE WHETHER STUDENTS WILL BE PROMOTED OR HELD BACK.

As students progress through each grade, the standards increase in complexity and standardized tests are used to assess mastery. Even in first grade, students are expected to learn how to use "bubble tests," albeit of a very simple sort. In this fashion, they are prepared for the most important hurdle in their elementary school years, a battery of tests in the third grade which determine whether they will be promoted or held back.

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[6] Jencks and Phillips (1998) note that different parenting styles, along with family background and environment, can contribute to the differences in Black – White test scores as well.

[7] See www.nycenet.edu/dis/whatdidyou/k/index.html for a full display of the Kindergarten standards.

Ending Social Promotion with High Stakes Testing

The movement to end social promotion has gathered force over the past ten years in response to concerns that the nation has been pushing the problem of poor academic performance under the rug. Employers continue to complain about lack of basic skills among high school graduates. Organizations like the Chamber of Commerce have taken an active role in backing test-based assessments to improve academic competency and increase the signaling power of a diploma (by refusing it to those who cannot pass the exams).[8] Politicians genuinely interested in improving the educational performance of low-income and minority children in higher grades, have insisted that the stakes be raised in the earliest grades, on the theory that catching problems at the front end will reduce the drop-out problem at the back end.

THE IDEA THAT STUDENTS SHOULD BE HELD BACK UNTIL THEY HAVE MASTERED GRADE-LEVEL MATERIAL HAS PROVEN TO BE POLITICALLY APPEALING TO ALL PARTS OF THE IDEOLOGICAL SPECTRUM.

Forty-six states have either implemented or are developing testing systems (American Federation of Teachers 1997, Hauser 1999). As Hauser (1999:5) points out, seven states "require schools and districts to use the state standards and assessments in determining whether students should be promoted into certain grades."[9] The idea that students should be held back until they have mastered grade-level material has proven to be politically appealing to all parts of the ideological spectrum. From those who feel schools have

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[8] In New York State, for example, employers played an active role in encouraging the introduction of a mandatory regents diploma for all high school graduates, which entails a battery of "regents tests" to acquire. In Massachusetts, employers have been among the leading voices arguing for the creation of the MCAS examination, a rigorous set of tests in English, Science, Mathematics, and History as prerequisites for graduation. As the exam results filtered in and showed widespread problems of mastery, particularly in city schools and the poorer suburbs, political clamor has erupted, aimed at eliminating the MCAS requirement. Employers have rallied to the cause and succeeded in bolstering the determination of the Department of Education to retain them, albeit with relaxed passing standards, some modification of the exam's themselves, and the introduction of appeal procedures.

[9] Hauser (1999: 5, footnote 2) notes that Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, New Mexico, North Carolina, and West Virginia have all implemented these testing requirements for promotion.

lowered their standards (mainly conservatives) to those who argue that it is damning children to let them leave school without the work-related skills they need (mainly liberals), the appeal of tougher standards is widespread. Indeed, President George W. Bush caught this mood very clearly when he argued that to do anything less was to subject poor and minority children to the soft tyranny of "low expectations." [10] However, supporters of more rigorous instruction – at least the liberals among them – also envisioned significant resources in remediation that would provide adequate resources to pull all children up to standard. This has been forthcoming in some cities, but even in the most attentive of them is often insufficient to the task despite considerable investment in summer school, tutoring programs, and other forms of remediation.

THERE IS VERY LITTLE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AVAILABLE TO HELP US IN UNDERSTANDING WHETHER ENDING SOCIAL PROMOTION WILL MAKE FOR SOUND EDUCATIONAL POLICY.

There is very little empirical research available to help us in understanding whether ending social promotion will make for sound educational policy. Data on students retained in grade are hard to come by, seldom standardized in ways that permit comparisons across states, and collected either sporadically or at incommensurate points in children's lives (e.g. 4th grade in some states, 8th grade in others). Hence, assessing trends in grade retention has proven difficult at national and state levels.[11] Robert Hauser, sociologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, joined with colleagues at the National Academic of Sciences to do some of the most influential research on this topic.[12] We draw extensively on Hauser's work on the topic here, as it is the most thorough and updated review of the national data, such as it is.

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[10] President Bush in his education bill from January of 2002, cautioned that "children are segregating by low expectations, illiteracy and self doubt." Taken from www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/esea/nclb/part1.html.

[11] "The main federal source of information about education, The National Center for Education Statistics, provides essentially no statistics about grade retention or social promotion. For example, there are no data on this subject in current editions of its two major statistical compendia, the *Digest of Education Statistics...* and the *Condition of Education...*" (Hauser 1999: 10).

[12] Hauser (1999:8) notes with some irony that "[he] doubts that governments currently make important policy decisions about any other social process with so little in the way of sound, basic, descriptive information."

"RETENTION RATES TEND TO BE RELATIVELY HIGH IN THE EARLY PRIMARY GRADES – THOUGH NOT IN KINDERGARTEN – AND IN THE EARLY HIGH SCHOOL YEARS."

Hauser's review of the existing evidence suggests that patterns of grade retention are, as it were, all over the map. "Retention rates tend to be relatively high in the early primary grades - though not in kindergarten - and in the early high school years." (Hauser 1999:9). We are handicapped, however, in our ability to determine with certainty patterns of intra-state variation, because there are no common metrics in use that permit simple comparisons. Moreover, for many states, we simply lack any data at all, a situation that is not much better at the federal level.

Hauser found, using national census data, that "age-grade retention increased in every age group from cohorts of the early 1970s through those of the middle to late 1980s."[13] General patterns of grade retention mask the differences that mark the experience of boys versus girls, ethnic minorities versus whites, and income groups (Heubert and Hauser 1999). Suburban parents in affluent neighborhoods often hold their son's back from entering Kindergarten to compensate for developmental differences in fine motor skills and general attention span, a practice that has come to be called "red shirting." The popularity of this practice helps to account for the mixed pattern of ages in Kindergarten and first grade and should not be confused with age-grade retention at issue in this paper. To get beyond the complexity that age at school entry imposes, Hauser finds that boys are more likely than girls to be held back, and the

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[13] In the absence of direct means of measuring the frequency with which kids are being held back, Hauser developed indirect methods and applied them to the Current Population Survey conducted by the Census Bureau. He looked at the annual October School Enrollment Supplement of the CPS which presents data on the "distribution of school enrollment by age and grade each year for groups defined by sex and race/ethnicity." Hauser computed grade retention by "observing changes in the enrollment of children below the modal grade level for their age from one calendar year to the next." He explains the method as follows: Suppose, for example, that 10 percent of 6 year old children were enrolled below the 1st grade in October of 1994. If 15 percent of those children were enrolled below the 2nd grade in October of 1995, when they were 7 years old, we would infer that at least 5 percent were held back in the 1st grade between 1994 and 1995. (Hauser 1999:10)

the gap between the genders grows with age. But the most striking differentials are those that separate the races and ethnic groups:

> The rates of age-grade retardation are very similar among whites, black and Hispanics at age 6 to 8. However, by ages 9 to 11, the percentages enrolled below modal grade level are typically 5 to 10 percentage points higher among blacks or Hispanics than among whites.[14]

These differences widen as children reach the upper levels of high school. Hence, while the earliest grades are a motley mixture of ages, reflecting different patterns of age upon entry, differential patterns of grade retention are at work by the time kids reach the age of 9. Girls and whites are "on target" for age and grade appropriate promotion, but boys and minorities fall way behind.

WHY DO WE CARE? CRITICS OF SOCIAL PROMOTION HAVE POINTED OUT THAT KEEPING KIDS BACK, UNTIL THEY LEARN WHAT THEY NEED TO KNOW, WILL BETTER INSURE THEIR EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS DOWNSTREAM. THE AVAILABLE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THIS IS NOT THE CASE.

Why do we care? Critics of social promotion have pointed out that keeping kids back, until they learn what they need to know, will better insure their educational success downstream. The available evidence suggests this is not the case. Initial benefits fade after three or more grades, leaving students who have been retained farther behind their age mates. Holmes (1989) examined sixty-three controlled studies of grade-retention in elementary school and junior high and found that 54 of them revealed negative effects, while 9 were positive. The negative effects were most powerful in those studies with the most reliable research designs.[15] Students who are held back suffer educational deficits compared to their counterparts of the same age—where the retained student had completed one less grade than the promoted students. Test scores in math and reading are also negatively impacted (McCoy and Reynolds 1998). Of particular importance for the present study are the findings of Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber (1994) which showed that students retained in first grade

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[14] Hauser (1999:19) explains that this pattern continues into the upper reaches of high school, where Hispanics are more likely than either whites or blacks to drop out.
[15] Subjects matched on IQ, achievement tests, gender and SES in order to isolate the impact of grade retention.

"fall farther and farther behind never-retained youngsters for as long as we can monitor their progress."[16]

To summarize what is known at this point, we note:

- Grade retention was on the increase before the most recent push to limit social promotion.
- Minorities and boys, and most of all minority boys, are at greatest risk for grade retention.
- Students who are retained complete fewer years of schooling and have lower test scores in math and reading.

THESE FINDINGS SHOULD GIVE US PAUSE, BUT THEY DO NOT SEEM TO HAVE REACHED THE EARS OF POLICY MAKERS WHO HAVE EMBRACED THE CHANGE AT PRECISELY THE TIME WHEN PARENTS OF CHILDREN MOST AT RISK ARE, PERHAPS, LEAST ABLE TO STEP UP TO THE PLATE.

These findings should give us pause, but they do not seem to have reached the ears of policy makers who have embraced the change at precisely the time when parents of children most at risk are, perhaps, least able to step up to the plate.

The New York City Experience

New York City, where our research was conducted, has been particularly aggressive in ending social promotion. Robert Hauser (1999:6) explains how this policy unfolded in the nation's largest public school system:

> In 1998, New York City Public School Chancellor, Rudy Crew proposed that 4th and 7th graders be held back if they fail a new state reading test at their grade level, beginning in spring 2000. Crew's proposal initially combined testing of students with 'a comprehensive evaluation of their course work and a review of their attendance records.' A two-year delay in implementation of the tests would permit schools 'to identify those students deemed most at risk and give them intensive remedial instruction. (Steinberg, 1998a, 1998b). However, late in the spring of 1999, under intense political pressure, Crew abandoned established policies and ordered

[16] For a discussion of the methodological problems in this study, see Hauser "Shall We End Social Promotion? Truth or Consequences." Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, CDE Working Paper No. 99-06. 1999, and Shepard and Smith, "Failed Evidence on Grade Retention." In Psychology in the Schools 33(3): 251-61. 1996.

> thousands of third and sixth graders who had performed poorly on a new reading test to attend summer school and pass a new test at summer's end or be held back a year....

The stakes were clearly quite high. Schools, especially those in poor neighborhoods, were on edge about student performance. While many parents stood to gain by having their children in summer school - taking care of a child care need that might have to be met in other ways without this option - just as many were concerned about the negative impact of labeling should their children fall short. And children themselves became increasingly aware that they were under pressure to do well. Newspapers carried accounts of kids worrying out loud about what would happen if they did not pass,[17] with concern over the social stigma running at least as high as panic over failing in rather public ways.

WE DO HAVE SOME DATA ON CHILDREN'S PERFORMANCE ON EXAMINATIONS IN READING AND MATHEMATICS, AND ASSIGNMENT TO MANDATORY SUMMER SCHOOL. THE COMMUNITIES WE STUDIED HAD A HIGH PROPORTION OF CHILDREN IN TROUBLE.

We do not yet have information on children who have been held back as a consequence of former Chancellor Rudy Crew's 1999 policy. However, we do have some data on children's performance on examinations in reading and mathematics, and assignment to mandatory summer school. The communities we studied - Washington Heights, Fort Greene and Sunset Park - had a high proportion of children in trouble. Indeed, the figures undoubtedly underestimate the difficulties because school districts are large and take into their "catchment" affluent areas and poor areas. For example, District 15, which includes the racially mixed, immigrant, poor, and working class neighborhood of Sunset Park, also includes Park Slope, the most affluent area of Brooklyn. Hence, the following data tells us what happened on exam performance at the district level, while the neighborhoods we focused on are undoubtedly at the bottom end of their internal distribution:

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[17] Lee, Felicia. "Tested." New York Times. Nov 11, 2001. Time for Kids writers. "Too Many Tests?" Time for Kids. January 25, 2002. Vol. 7. No 14.

PERCENT "FAILING TO MEET STANDARDS" AND MANDATED TO ENROLL IN SUMMER SCHOOL[18]

District 6 (Inwood, West Harlem... including Washington Heights)

Reading: 22.9
Math: 35.4
Mandated summer school: 11%

District 13 (Brooklyn Heights, Bedford-Stuyvesant...includes Fort Greene)

Reading: 22.0
Math: 37.3
Mandated summer school: 24.5%

District 15 (South Brooklyn, Park Slope... includes Sunset Park)

Reading: 15.7
Math: 28.6
Mandated summer school: 3.8%

OVERALL, ABOUT 20% OF NEW YORK CITY'S SCHOOL CHILDREN (190,000 STUDENTS) WERE REQUIRED TO ATTEND SUMMER SCHOOL IN 2001 BECAUSE OF FAILING TEST SCORES.

Overall, about 20% of New York City's school children - 190,000 students - were required to attend summer school in 2001 because of failing test scores.[19] 72,000 of them were in grades 3-8, while the rest were in high school. Among the elementary school children in this "at risk" group, 40% failed the examinations given at the end of the summer that were to determine, in consort with attendance records and classroom performance, their grade promotion prospects. There is a good deal of noise in this data and district-by-district comparisons suggest a great deal of variation in grade promotion practices. Nonetheless, the numbers are not small. If 40% of the 20% who were mandated to take summer school were held back, then systemwide, we would expect that in excess of 28,000 children were eligible for retention last year.

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[18] New York Times. "Wide Disparity on Promoting Failing Pupils." August 23, 2001.
[19] New York Times. "Wide Disparity on Promoting Failing Pupils." August 23, 2001, and New York Times. "One Third of Public School Students Enroll for Summer School." July 3, 2001.

The test scores have generated an increased effort to boost children's school performance through increased "time on task." Drill and practice tests became more frequent in third grade classrooms. Expectations for academic achievement in earlier grades rose (see Kindergarten standards at www.nycenet.edu/dis/whatdidyou/k/index.html), as teachers well recognized that they could not work miracles in a single year. Instead, it was necessary to back into the tests by increasing mastery at earlier grades. Many educators applauded the reforms for exactly these reasons, though elsewhere controversy ignited over the poor alignment of tests with curriculum.[20] For New York schools, though, part of the answer lay in enlisting parents in the task of education.

IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A MANTRA AMONG EDUCATORS THAT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN A CHILD'S INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT IS ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESS IN SCHOOL.

It has always been a mantra among educators that parental involvement in a child's intellectual development is essential for success in school. There is nothing new in this observation. However, one look at the brochures put out by the New York City Board of Education immediately after Rudy Crew put an end to social promotion, makes clear how essential parents are to the task of pulling children over the hurdles imposed by high stakes tests. Parents were admonished to read to their children nightly, to listen to their children read back, to visit libraries and museums, to use trips to the grocery store as opportunities for problem solving in math. No longer was the homefront the place where kids relax and then do a little homework. It had become another site for test preparation with parents standing in for teachers after hours. Parents got the word that their children's future in school was at least, in part, their responsibility. And while this has always been true, the sense of urgency was underlined in missives that insisted that parents were being held accountable for their children's progress.

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[20] This was particularly the case in Massachusetts, whose rigorous MCAS test, administered starting in the fourth grade, put students through 16 hours of written examinations covering English, Math, History, and Science. These are not aptitude tests, but are rather closer to a child's version of the SAT II subject tests. Hence, misalignment (e.g., testing algebraic concepts before a child has been exposed to them) caused widespread failure and rising parental ire, even in wealthy suburbs with a surplus of strong students and well-educated families.

FOR MIDDLE-CLASS PARENTS LONG ACCUSTOMED TO THIS SUPPORTING ROLE, THE DIFFICULTIES OF "HOME SCHOOLING" ARE SERIOUS ENOUGH.

For middle-class parents long accustomed to this supporting role, the difficulties of "home schooling" are serious enough. Dual-career families are caught between the long hours at work and the ever-present responsibilities of parental tutoring in the evening. But affluent parents can trade on their own wells of educational advantage in providing that extra instruction and where that fails, they may hire tutors to assist their children. Academically oriented after-school programs are more likely to be in place in well-heeled suburbs than in poor, inner city schools. Middle-class families are more likely to have reading material in their homes. It takes little prompting for them to work with their children to learn letters, colors, and numbers. They are, after all, the major audience for Sesame Street, originally developed to close the gap in pre-school preparation for poor children.[21]

FOR POOR PARENTS, THE TASK IS MORE DAUNTING.

WHAT THEY DID HAVE, AT LEAST BEFORE THEY INCREASED THEIR WORK HOURS IN RESPONSE TO WELFARE REFORM, WAS TIME.

For poor parents, the task is more daunting, only in part because they lack the educational advantages and the material resources that can make a difference. What they did have, at least before they increased their work hours in response to welfare reform, was time. They could insert themselves in their children's schools as volunteers - and they did. They could find time and space in their cramped apartments for kids to do their homework - and they did that as well. Even when they could not tell whether the work was really done because of limited English proficiency, they could certainly figure out whether or not Juan was bent over his books. Organizational strengths know no income boundaries; indeed it could be argued that poor families have to be better organized because they have so little margin for error. Yet, as we will see in the ethnographic section below, staying on track, maintaining household discipline, attracting attention through volunteer work in school, and making time to go to the branch library, becomes much harder to do when work hours ratchet up. That is precisely

STAYING ON TRACK, MAINTAINING HOUSEHOLD DISCIPLINE, ATTRACTING ATTENTION THROUGH VOLUNTEER WORK IN SCHOOL, AND MAKING TIME TO GO TO THE BRANCH LIBRARY, BECOMES MUCH HARDER WHEN WORK HOURS RATCHET UP.

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[21] The availability of Sesame Street actually widened the gap in preschool preparation because middle-class parents took disproportionate advantage of the opportunity to expose their children to the program. (Thomas Cook, 1975. Sesame Street Revisited. New York: Russell Sage Press; Thomas Cook and Ross Connor, Sesame Street Around the World: The Educational Impact; Journal of Communications 26; 2; 155-64; Spring 1976.).

what we observed during our fieldwork in 1998-99 as the consequences of the 1996 welfare legislation began to take root.

The Impact of Welfare Reform

Between 1995 and 1998, the population on AFDC in New York City dropped from approximately 1.2 million to 810,000 (more than half of whom are children). Even before the time limits expired, bureaucratic hurdles to AFDC were increased. Workfare became the order of the day, with recipients required to work in order to maintain their benefits.[22] These forces, combined with increasing employment opportunities, drove the welfare rolls down.

At least in the early years of declining rolls, adults leaving the welfare system had a difficult time finding work. Among the adults who left welfare in New York City between July 1996 and March 1997, only 29 percent found full- or part-time jobs (defined as earning $100 or more within three months of leaving the rolls).[23] Statewide results were better; slightly more than one-third found work. After that time, labor markets have tightened considerably, pulling many low skilled workers into the workforce. Among them were thousands of parents, especially those of young children.

NOT ONLY DOES THE MAJORITY OF MOTHERS WORK, BUT THERE IS AN ESTIMATED 20 TO 25 HOUR PER WEEK GAP BETWEEN PARENTS' WORK SCHEDULES AND STUDENTS' SCHOOL SCHEDULES.

In 1998, nationwide, some 5.3 million low-income children between ages 6 and 12 had both parents or a single parent working after school (Halpern 1999). The 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce found that although the vast majority of workers had day-to-day family responsibilities, employees spent an average of 44 hours per week working (6 more than they are scheduled for) (Bond, Galinsky and Swanberg, 1998). Not only does the majority of mothers work, but there is an estimated 20 to 25 hour per week gap between parents' work schedules and students' school schedules (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1998).

Bond, Galinsky and Swanberg (1998) also found that the proportion of employees living in dual-earner families have

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[22] They started to work along side many others who have always worked in menial jobs without ever having received public benefits.

[23] New York Times, "Evidence is Scant that Workfare Leads to Full Time Jobs," April 12, 1998.

increased tremendously over the past 20 years, thus the pooled time for childcare (if they have children) and household work is decreasing, creating additional stresses off the job. Forty-six percent of all workers are parents (have children under 18 who live with them). In dual-earner households, 75 percent have partners who work full-time. These workers are also working more hours per week than 20 years ago. The average number of hours worked in 1977, was 43.6 hours and increased to 47.1 in 1997. The difference between men and women and the hours they worked were especially striking. Men's work hours increased 2.8 hr/week from 47.1 to 49.9 hours whereas women's hours increased 5 hours/week from 39 to 44 hours. Data also showed that nearly 1 in 5 workers were required to work overtime—and work had become more demanding in this same 20-year-period.

The Fiscal Policy Institute (2001) found similar data for New York State. In their report, The State of Working New York 2001, they reported that New York's married couple families are working longer hours: 3,531 hours per year in the late 1990s versus 3,339 hours per year in the late 1980s. This is a difference of 193 hours per year which—when assuming 50 weeks per year --is an increase of 3.8 hours per week. However, they found that those in the second to lowest income quintile actually increased their average full time work week hours by over 15 percent.[24] Families, in general, worked longer hours to achieve only modest increases in income.

FAMILIES, IN GENERAL, WORKED LONGER HOURS TO ACHIEVE ONLY MODEST INCREASES IN INCOME.

On a Collision Course: Children's Schooling and Parents' Work

How did the working poor families we tracked during this period cope with the increased expectations of children in school? A variety of adaptations emerged, driven in part by the demography of each household. Some families have two

[24] Moreover, there has been an increase in the gender wage gap in New York, while the trend decreased for the rest of the country. From 1989 to 2000, the median wage for women fell from 82% of the male wage to 81% of the male wage. Median wages for Black and Hispanic families fell faster (by 10.7%) than Whites (by 5.4%) over the same period. White women's wages remained constant, while they fell by 5.5% for Black women and 8.7% for Hispanic women.

parents who assisted with the care and management of the children. Others had only a single parent on which to rely. The ratio of adults to children and the number of adult hours available after school to assist with everything from homework to bathing varied considerably across the households.

So,too,did their knowledge of the school system. Most families knew what the school wanted parents to do for their children. Yet some parents were more sophisticated than others and knew how to maneuver in the system to get what they needed for their children. Other parents were much more traditional, defining teachers and school administrators as authority figures who should not be questioned or badgered. Both kinds of parents, nevertheless, needed to handle homework, dinner and bathing during the precious few hours they and their children had together before bedtime. Some households found ways to manage these burdens, but over the course of our fieldwork, it became more difficult for most of them, producing adaptations that cut into one bottom line - the workplace - or the other - children's school performance.

PARENTS NEEDED TO HANDLE HOMEWORK, DINNER AND BATHING DURING THE PRECIOUS FEW HOURS THEY AND THEIR CHILDREN HAD TOGETHER BEFORE BEDTIME. SOME HOUSEHOLDS FOUND WAYS TO MANAGE THESE BURDENS, BUT OVER THE COURSE OF OUR FIELDWORK, IT BECAME MORE DIFFICULT FOR MOST OF THEM, PRODUCING ADAPTATIONS THAT CUT INTO ONE BOTTOM LINE – THE WORKPLACE – OR THE OTHER – CHILDREN'S SCHOOL PERFORMANCE.

The Ethnographic Lens

Over the course of a year, we followed 12 families, a mixture of African American, Puerto Rican and Dominican in three different working class neighborhoods. Of the 12 families, 9 of them had elementary school-age children or younger living with them. Here we focus on four African American families, four Dominican families, and one Puerto Rican family. All of the school-aged children in this ethnographic study are in local public elementary or middle schools. The toddlers are all taken care of by their grandmothers. Hence, among these families, we are able to examine the experience of eleven elementary-aged kids from the ages of 5-11 and 3 preschoolers (2-yr-olds). This is a small sample, studied at close range over a long period of time. Its value lies in the evidence these families provide for adaptations to the simultaneous demands of the workplace and the schoolroom.

It may be helpful at the outset, to describe the dramatis personae[25]:

African American Families

1. **Nina:** Nina is 32 and has an adopted, 6-year-old son and a 14-year-old daughter. She is also responsible for her niece, who is the biological mother of Nina's adopted son. Nina was on welfare for many years, but as a consequence of the 1996 reforms, was given a "workfare" assignment at New York City Housing, "pulling garbage and sweeping the court yards." While on "workfare" she applied to every job that listed an opening and to her good fortune, found one with the Long Island Railroad (LIRR). She now holds a unionized job as a cleaner on the night shift. She's been there for a little more than a year. She enjoys having a little bit of money to use as she wants. Specifically, she hopes to save money to buy a house but at present is often reduced to "geesing" men in her life (hitting them up for money) to survive. This sometimes borders on prostitution.

NINA NOW HOLDS A UNIONIZED JOB AS A CLEANER ON THE NIGHT SHIFT.

2. **Robert:** Robert and his spouse receive TANF[26] benefits on behalf of their kids, food stamps, and SSI[27] as they are both disabled (and he is a veteran). They are in their mid-50s, but appear to be much older because of poor health. Neither he nor his wife is working "on the books." Robert does have under-the-table earnings; he is a caterer and he was included in the study in part to explore the role of the underground economy. Robert is also the legal guardian of two of his grandchildren because their mother is an addict. The older of these two grandchildren, Janine, who is in the 4th grade, is an especially gifted student. Twelve people sleep in his one-bedroom apartment because of the need to double up in the midst of the rising costs of housing in Fort Greene. Some of Robert's children or his wife's children and grandchildren bunk together in this apartment. All of his grandchildren are encouraged to do well in school.

TWELVE PEOPLE SLEEP IN ROBERT'S ONE-BEDROOM APARTMENT BECAUSE OF THE NEED TO DOUBLE UP IN THE MIDST OF RISING HOUSING COSTS.

[25] The names used in this paper are not real.
[26] Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): This program was created by the welfare reform law of 1996.
[27] Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

FRIDA'S LIFE IS CENTERED AROUND HER CANCER TREATMENTS AND HER SONS.

3. **Frida:** Frida, the mother of three sons (8, 13 and 18), has cancer and was born in Panama. She used to work for the city as a night-time security guard while her mother looked after the kids. Frida's cancer treatment is covered by her work health insurance. Now that she has left her job (after having spent time on disability leave), her life is centered around her cancer treatments and her sons. Her oldest son is in the army. The two boys who live at home do not get along and are always fighting, causing Frida a lot of stress. Asthma runs in the family, and her youngest son also has a heart problem.

DEBRA'S FORMER MOTHER-IN-LAW BABYSITS HER TODDLER WHILE SHE WORKS, BUT THIS CHILDCARE SITUATION IS EXTREMELY PROBLEMATIC, BORDERING ON DANGEROUS.

4. **Debra:** Although African American, Debra lives in Washington Heights (primarily a Dominican neighborhood). She has three children, two in elementary school and the third a toddler. The oldest daughter repeated third grade. Debra's former mother-in-law babysits the younger one while she works but this childcare situation is extremely problematic, bordering on dangerous. Welfare reform meant that Debra had to work for her welfare benefits, and she was assigned to a clerical position in a welfare office. Much to her delight, Debra just recently got a permanent position in the same office to which she had been assigned by the TANF authorities. Before Debra was required to work, she was the Treasurer for her children's PTA and spent many hours as a volunteer in their school. This activity came to an end with her workfare job.

Dominican Families:

MARIA HAS A VOCATIONAL BUSINESS/CLERICAL HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE, KNOWS ENGLISH, AND IS ABLE TO PROVIDE CULTURAL ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES FOR HER CHILD.

1. **Maria:** Maria is a first generation immigrant, and is a licensed family daycare provider who mainly takes care of the children of employees of Columbia Presbyterian Hospital. She has a vocational business/clerical High School degree, knows English, and is able to provide cultural enrichment activities for her child. Maria has had experience taking care of children whose low-income parents had childcare funding from the city. Maria and her grandmother are the day care providers in their small business, conducted out of her home. Their program also offers after school care to the older siblings of the young children in their care. Maria is divorced and has one daughter who was finishing the 4th grade during our year of study. Maria also tutors her daughter in math and other subjects.

ELISA'S YOUNGER SON WAS DIAGNOSED WITH LEAD POISONING WHEN HE WAS ABOUT A YEAR OLD.

2. **Elisa:** Elisa is in the middle of a job search. She suspects that she was laid off from a factory job because the company was changing production or was not planning to hire any employees permanently. She has signed up to clean at Macy's and submitted an application at Maid in NY. Elisa is an immigrant and because of her limited English, she mainly looks for factory work or cleaning jobs. For a while she was receiving SSI for her son Calvin (age 14 - diagnosed with ADD) and she was also getting $143 in public assistance and food stamps. She closed her case and began to look for work outside of workfare jobs. She also has two younger sons (5 and 8). The younger son was diagnosed with lead poisoning when he was about a year old with a lead level of 20.9. He may have associated developmental problems since he was not toilet trained until about the age of four.

MARGARITE MAKES CLOSE TO MINIMUM WAGE ($5.81/HOUR) AND DOES NOT DO ANY OVERTIME, EVEN FOR EXTRA EARNINGS, BECAUSE LONGER HOURS WOULD DEPRIVE HER OF HER TIME WITH HER DAUGHTERS.

3. **Margarite:** Margarite works as a clerk at a doctor's office on Manhattan's West Side. She works as a temporary worker - even though she has been there for close to a year. She makes close to minimum wage ($5.81/hour) and does not do any overtime, even for extra earnings, because longer hours would deprive her of her time with her daughters (6 and 8 years old). She is an immigrant and speaks some English; however she feels more comfortable speaking Spanish. Margarite continues to receive limited TANF benefits. She receives Medicaid for herself and her daughters, food stamps, and rent assistance of $231 from Northern Manhattan, a social service advocacy agency. She is married, but her husband was deported back to the Dominican Republic because of an immigration problem that occurred nearly 15 years ago. Her youngest was diagnosed with high lead blood levels when she was about a year old. According to Margarite, her blood lead levels returned to normal levels when she switched to a new diet high in iron. Other children in her building had been diagnosed with very high blood lead levels.

4. **Leena:** Leena and her two sons (2 and 8) used to be on AFDC and food stamps. Leena now works full time in a medical office and has been promoted several times. However, she owes a lot of money because of high credit card debts. Leena is an immigrant but she speaks English well. However, her mother who is a recent immigrant knows very little English. Her mother babysits the youngest one because Leena cannot afford paid childcare. Her mother also watches the older son after school. During the study year,

DURING THE STUDY YEAR, LEENA'S 8-YEAR-OLD SON WAS WARNED THAT HIS READING SKILLS WERE NOT UP TO PAR AND HE WAS AT RISK FOR BEING HELD BACK.

OLENA'S 7-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER IS STRUGGLING, AND DURING OUR STUDY YEAR, WAS HELD BACK IN THE SECOND GRADE.

WE SPENT TIME INTERVIEWING SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS IN THE NEIGHBORHOODS WHERE THESE KIDS ATTEND SCHOOL AND FOUND THEM BURDENED BY OVERCROWDING AND ACADEMIC SHORTCOMINGS THAT PRE-DATED THE NEW STANDARDS.

Leena's 8-year-old son was warned that his reading skills were not up to par and he was at risk for being held back. Leena is also an immigrant.

Puerto Rican Family:

Olena: Olena was once on welfare. She started training and looking for a job before she had to because she didn't want to be subject to time limits. She speaks English, even though Spanish is her first language. She works as a para-professional in a local public school. Olena has a 21-year-old son and a 7-year-old daughter. She is trying to spend time reading with her daughter to improve her reading skills. But the girl is struggling and during our study year - her daughter was held back in the second grade.

Schools in Context

Before turning to family adaptations, a word is in order about the schools the children in our study attend. We spent time interviewing school principals and teachers in the neighborhoods where these kids attend school and found them burdened by overcrowding and academic shortcomings that pre-dated the new standards. For example, in Washington Heights, where five of our families reside, the elementary schools have been severely overcrowded for the past seven years, a product of the increasing Dominican immigrant population. A principal at one of the elementary schools told us that:

> "The entire District 6 received a waiver from the capping regulations for class size. The class size regulations are as follows: 25 students for kindergarten, 28 students for grades 1 through 3 and 32 students for grades 4 and 5. At one point, PS 128 had 35 students in kindergarten and as many as 45 students in grades 4 and 5. In addition at PS 128, almost all of its students live in poverty; 95% qualify for free lunch. Ninety-five percent of its students are from the Dominican Republic. Two percent are from South America and the rest are African Americans."

This scenario plays itself out in our other two neighborhoods as well: Sunset Park and the Fort Greene area.

SCHOOLS ARE UNDERFUNDED AS WELL.

Schools are not only overcrowded, but are underfunded as well. Although we think of public schools as subsisting entirely on government support, the fact is that budget pressures have forced many schools to become public/private partnerships in raising the funds to sustain their most basic activities. The capacity of parents in poor neighborhoods to raise funds for supplies, field trips, library books, and the like cannot possibly match the abilities of more affluent parents in pricier neighborhoods. Parents in our study complain bitterly about the supplies they have to buy for their children, as our field notes from the opening of the school year suggest:

> Robert's wife expressed her anger that she had to spend $80.00 for supplies, and still needs about $20.00 more in supplies later. "I have to buy supplies that they don't have in school...it doesn't make any sense. I'm not talking about notebooks or paper, I'm talking about supplies." She said that basics, such as glue, scissors, tape and folders had to be bought. Robert's wife pointed out that there are a lot of people out there that don't have the money for that; even she had to borrow the money to get those things.

OUR PARENTS RECOGNIZE THAT NON-MONETARY CONTRIBUTIONS -- PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND EXPERTISE -- ARE UNEQUALLY DISTRIBUTED.

Our parents realize that schools in more affluent neighborhoods have an easier time raising money. They also recognize that non-monetary contributions - parental involvement and expertise - are unequally distributed. One of our parents, Nina, was able to send her daughter to a majority white elementary school in Park Slope. She mentioned that there was a huge disparity between that school and the schools in her own Fort Greene/Crown Heights neighborhood, which she knows about from her neighbor's children. Nina made good use of her knowledge of the system to maneuver her daughter out of the local elementary school and into a better one in a Whiter neighborhood, where she was clearly more advantaged. Nina told us that she:

> Felt that because her older daughter went to a primary school in Park Slope - which was predominately white - there was more to offer than if she had attended school in Crown Heights, a majority black neighborhood. Park Slope parents are more involved in the school and demand more from

> [the school] on behalf of their children. Nina is convinced that if she lived in another neighborhood, the teachers would be inclined to put her older daughter in Special Education, something, she adds, that is happening a lot to Black and Hispanic children. When a White child has problems, she notes, the school system takes a different approach and is generally less eager to label the child as it would be in dealing with a child of color. The Park Slope school teachers had more patience with the children.

Nina was extremely happy with her daughter's education.

"IN CROWN HEIGHTS, THERE ARE SO MANY KIDS, SOMEBODY IS GOING TO MISS OUT. OVER THERE [IN PARK SLOPE], THEY HAVE VOLUNTEERS, THEY'VE GOT KIDS FROM COLLEGES COMING IN, THEY'VE GOT TUTORS..."

> I think they pushed her more, gave her a lot more confidence than I think she would have over in the Black community. Basically over there they had more patience....in Crown Heights, there are so many kids, somebody is going to miss out. Over there [in Park Slope], they have volunteers, they've got kids from colleges coming in, they've got tutors...Over here, they might not have that, and they might not even know to put in for that.

Moreover, Nina tells us that:

> If there was a competition for funding between Crown Heights and Park Slope, Park Slope would get it because they are White, they have more money, they have more politicians, and the members of the community would organize to get what they want from the city. In Crown Heights, if the community does not get funds that they need, no one will organize a bake sale or a flea market to raise funds for the school. She adds that Park Slope gets the same resources but they use them on different things. For example, in Crown Heights, they use money on trips to amusement parks or other outings, in Park Slope, they will use the money to buy more books and computers.

Debra, an African American parent living in a Dominican neighborhood, sends her children to a Harlem public school so that they can be near their grandmother (Debra's ex-mother-in-law). While Debra works, the grandmother babysits her two-year old, and watches the two older ones after school. Because of the lack of better childcare options

for all three of her children, Debra did not remove them from the school, even though she worries about whether or not they are safe. Her own strategy, at least before she was working, was to protect her kids through her own volunteer involvement in the school. However, her presence did not make an enormous difference in the school's quality: it merely gave her a first-hand understanding of how dicey it was. She was privy to the hallway discussions among teachers and administrators about bringing police to the school on a permanent basis. Some kids act out in violent ways against the teachers and other children. As a consequence, police are constantly at her children's school. It may be, she imagines, that the kids are following the examples set by their own parents. Confrontations between teachers and parents, some of which have turned into serious shoving matches and verbal confrontations, happen often enough to alarm her.

Debra sometimes thinks about taking her children out of the school, in part because of violence (gangs like the Crips and Bloods are recruiting at her kid's school), but mainly because she thinks the parents in the school do not monitor their children's work or behavior. She has seen 9-year-old children walking their younger siblings to school. She knows that this happens because the parents are working, but she is also convinced they don't really care.

ONE TEACHER WE INTERVIEWED SUGGESTED ANOTHER IMPORTANT REASON WHY PARENTS MAY NOT GET INVOLVED IN THE SCHOOL: WORRIES ABOUT DEPORTATION ON THE PART OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS.

There may be truth in Debra's observations, but in immigrant neighborhoods like Sunset Park and Washington Heights, at least one teacher we interviewed suggested another important reason why parents may not get involved in the school: worries about deportation on the part of undocumented immigrants. The typical Washington Heights elementary school we visited had enrollments that are 75% to 85% Dominican, and 90% of the students are eligible for free lunch. The families are poor. Teachers explain that parents are as responsive as they can be under these conditions, but are preoccupied by the need to make a living while existing in the shadow of the law.

These contextual factors - overcrowding, underfunding, discipline problems, and poverty - combine to make the climate in the city's heavily minority schools difficult to begin with. Teachers report that they are barely treading water as they try to cope with the social problems that surround them. Against this backdrop, the city has upped

NEW STANDARDS OF ACADEMIC MASTERY, WHICH PRESUME NOT ONLY CALM CLASSROOMS ABLE TO FOCUS ON THE 3 R'S, BUT PARENTS WHO CAN SUPPLEMENT THE SCHOOL IN ITS EFFORTS, PRESENT A DAUNTING CHALLENGE.

THE HELP THAT OUR FAMILIES CAN PROVIDE TO THEIR CHILDREN IS UNEVEN.

the ante. New standards of academic mastery, which presume not only calm classrooms able to focus on the 3 R's, but parents who can supplement the school in its efforts, present a daunting challenge.

Three Responses to the Demands of Working and High Stakes Testing

Our parents and custodial grandparents all care about what happens to their children in school. Virtually without exception, they mean well and want the best for their children. However, the help that our families can provide to their children is uneven. Some parents are attuned to their children's needs and are capable of helping them because they know English and have some flexibility in their schedules that allows them to meet with administrators. At one time, this included parents on public assistance, who, like Debra, made their children's schools their "job" before they had to take a real one. That vantage point provided them with information they could use to maneuver around the system and get the best of what there was to have, even in schools with problems. Those who did not go this far, had more energy and opportunity to structure their children's time at home to get the homework done, even when the parents lacked the skills to provide much academic input.

Others face language difficulties, lack the time or the capability to push the schools to provide special help for their children, who need it all the more because their parents cannot provide it. Some of the parents, for example, most of the Dominicans, were reared in traditional cultures that define teachers as authority figures who should never be challenged. They regard the educators as the experts.

Our data suggest that two kinds of adaptations have emerged among the working poor as they confront increased expectations in the school system. These adaptations involve monitoring and trade-offs that pit the economic security and the occupational mobility prospects of the parents against the educational needs of the children.

Monitors: Parents Who Make a Difference

Maria, Robert and Frida are heads of three families who seem to understand children's cognitive development and the public school system well. These three parents understand

both the academic and administrative requirements needed to maneuver in the public elementary school system. Maria is a family childcare provider and also runs an after school program for a few elementary school children. Her schedule is somewhat flexible because her mother is her assistant at the home daycare she runs. Maria can attend her daughter's school events and parent/teacher activities. When she noticed that her own daughter was not receiving the attention she needed at her present school, Maria had the wherewithal to figure out which school her daughter could be transferred to. She recruited her ex-husband to complete the extensive paperwork needed for a transfer, and devoted several days to the running around required to enroll their daughter in her new school. Maria's ex-husband was able to help because he has a flexible job that enabled him to take several days off work to accomplish the task.

MARIA'S EX-HUSBAND WAS ABLE TO HELP BECAUSE HE HAS A FLEXIBLE JOB THAT ENABLED HIM TO TAKE SEVERAL DAYS OFF WORK TO ACCOMPLISH THE TASK OF ENROLLING THEIR DAUGHTER TO A NEW SCHOOL.

Robert is the grandfather of a gifted 4th grader, Janine. Although he is a disabled vet with a history of substance abuse problems, Robert completed high school and had additional training in the army (Vietnam). He appreciates the role of education in Janine's future and is incredibly proud of her accomplishments in elementary school. When a new visitor comes to Robert's modest apartment, he proudly displays the various awards and certificates Janine has garnered from her teachers, which are the main wall decorations in the living room. He clearly understands the kinds of activities that can help support Janine's development. All of the children in this household have library cards and their grandparents see to it that they make regular visits to the local branch.

ROBERT CLEARLY UNDERSTANDS THE KINDS OF ACTIVITIES THAT CAN HELP SUPPORT JANINE'S DEVELOPMENT.

The attention that Janine receives in school owes itself both to her own performance and to the interest her granddad has been able to attract for her from teachers who have singled her out. The special attention, in turn, derives from Robert's unique role within the school, made possible by the volunteer work he does there. Because he does not have a regular job, but rather works at home as a caterer, he is able to exert a special influence over his granddaughter's position in her school. Because the family receives SSI payments on behalf of their dependent grandchildren, they are not as likely to lose benefits as their welfare-reliant counterparts. These comparatively stable conditions permit Robert to devote time to volunteer at Janine's school. Indeed, he offers to cook *gratis* for special events at the

THE ATTENTION THAT JANINE RECEIVES IN SCHOOL OWES ITSELF BOTH TO HER OWN PERFORMANCE AND TO THE INTEREST HER GRANDDAD HAS BEEN ABLE TO ATTRACT FOR HER FROM TEACHERS WHO HAVE SINGLED HER OUT.

school and has gotten to know the teachers and administrators because he makes an appearance in the school on a fairly regular basis.

During a typical week of our field study, Robert visited Janine's teacher at school to ask if she could give his granddaughter more advanced work to do (he said he would bring an Algebra book of hers). Teachers, in return, respond positively to Robert and to Janine because they are gratified by his efforts to make a difference and by the high quality performance the young girl turns in. Teachers are looking out for Janine's well-being and are open about their hopes that she will be able to attend a more challenging school than the one they work in. For the time being, Robert and his wife believe that their grandchildren are getting the best education that is possible in a low performing school, but they know that it is not the highest quality overall. High turnover among teachers, a common problem in schools with many poor children, makes it hard even for them to develop ongoing relationships in the school.

HIGH TURNOVER AMONG TEACHERS, A COMMON PROBLEM IN SCHOOLS WITH MANY POOR CHILDREN, MAKES IT HARD EVEN FOR ROBERT AND HIS WIFE TO DEVELOP ONGOING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE SCHOOL.

Nonetheless, this family has to be regarded as a success story, able to respond to the demands from the school system for positive performance on high stakes tests, which Janine has passed with flying colors. Lest we conclude that they have managed this feat because they have special resources, we note that they live in a one-bedroom apartment with 12 family members, some of whom have drug problems. At least one of his kin is a teenage trouble case who brings gang involvement and police scrutiny in his wake. Robert's role boosts his grandchildren's educational performance, while his wife (who is almost completely disabled) devotes what time she spends outside the house to retaining their public benefits. Their most serious problems derive from the middle generation, their own now adult children, who continue to deposit grandchildren on their doorstep, at least one of whom is HIV positive at the age of 2. In many respects, the household is under extreme stress: poor, crowded, and vulnerable to the predatory activities of some of its members. Yet the most responsible adults within have marshaled time resources and applied them to educational support for their grandchildren, especially Janine.

Frida is the mother of three boys (8, 13, 18). The eldest is in the Army, the middle one is in junior high and is sometimes

in charge of picking up the youngest one from school. The youngest, Leroy, is 8 and is in the third grade.

WHILE FRIDA DOES NOT WORK, SHE SPENDS MOST OF HER TIME DEALING WITH CANCER TREATMENTS, WHICH CAN BE TIME CONSUMING AND EXHAUSTING. THUS, SHE DOES NOT HAVE A LOT OF ENERGY TO CHASE HER TWO SONS DOWN.

She has seen the school system increase the amount of testing and notes that testing now requires good reading skills even for the math tests. While Frida does not work, she spends most of her time dealing with cancer treatments which can be time consuming and exhausting. Thus, she does not have a lot of energy to chase her two sons down. However, she does have time at home and when she is well enough, she can spend it on her sons. Frida appreciates the importance of homework, and the role that parents play reviewing homework with their children.

As our fieldnotes show, Frida has spent a fair amount of time thinking about her children's schooling:

> I asked how Leroy was doing in school. She said that he could be doing better. "Even that area, I really feel like I'm failing my kid because his handwriting is very bad. It has improved...but..." Frida said that Leroy wrote a note to her telling her that he hates penmanship and that he wished they would abolish the subject. She said that it is hard for him to write, not only neatly, but in a way in which it makes sense. Frida thought that because writing was so easy for her older sons that it would be the same for Leroy, but he is, she said, another individual. "He's a different kid, so I have to work more with him, but it's hard for me to work with him because he cries so much..." She said that everyone else can correct him and it's no problem, but if she corrects him, then he is upset....

FRIDA SAID THAT THE TEACHERS AT LEROY'S SCHOOL "ARE SO OVERWHELMED WITH WORK THAT THEY DON'T HAVE TIME TO CHECK ANYTHING." SHE SAID THAT IT IS VERY RARE THAT SHE SEES THE RESULTS OF LEROY'S HOMEWORK.

> Frida is thinking about going to the library and putting up a sign for a tutor, even if it is ten dollars an hour, for an hour a week. "The school system is set up now, those tests are different...you got to read, understand what you read and write about it. And that's what he don't realize. It's not easy anymore..." Frida said that she is not satisfied with any of the teachers at Leroy's school. "To me they're not qualified as teachers, really. This one is a little better than the other one....But it's still not what I expect in a teacher. These teachers don't have time to check homework....They are so overwhelmed with

work that they don't have time to check anything." She said that it is very rare that she sees the results of Leroy's homework.

DESPITE THEIR MANY PROBLEMS (ESPECIALLY POVERTY AND ILLNESS), THESE THREE SETS OF PARENTS HAVE SIGNIFICANT ADVANTAGES WHICH MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL LIVES.

Despite their many problems (especially poverty and illness), these three sets of parents have significant advantages which make a difference in their children's educational lives. They each monitor their children in the school system fairly closely, either by volunteering, or by spending a lot of time going over homework. They are all English speakers. They also know how and when to intervene in the school system. Moreover, two of the three have significant others they can rely on. Robert is married and he depends on his wife to assist with the grandchildren. One of the two divorcees can call on her ex-husband to help in managing the demands of their daughter's education. Either their own jobs are flexible, or they work in the underground economy, with public benefits on the side. Either condition permits them greater opportunity to make a difference in their children's education. Although they are working poor, they have more education than many other poor families. They recognize the importance of this cultural capital and can provide positive input to their children's academic well-being. This does not always do the trick: Leroy is struggling in school despite Frida's efforts. However, she would be the first to say that he would be doing far worse were it not for her input.

Hard Choices: Tough Tradeoffs Between Work and Parenting

MARGARITE AND DEBRA LACK THE FLEXIBILITY IN TIME THAT THE "MONITOR" FAMILIES HAVE AT THEIR DISPOSAL, AND THE CONSEQUENCES ARE COMING HOME TO ROOST.

Margarite and Debra are examples of two working single mothers who try very hard to devote time to their children, but who face greater pressures and sacrifices in achieving the right balance between the need to work and the demands of family life. They know that they have to monitor their children because they cannot afford tutors, do not have other relatives they can lean on, and have less educational background to draw upon in making a difference. They make an effort to follow the schools' instructions about the need for a positive learning environment at home, but are often hemmed in by the demands they face in the work world. They lack the flexibility in time that the "monitor" families have at their disposal, and the consequences are coming home to roost.

MARGARITE HOARDS VACATION TIME AND APPLIES IT TO THE DAYS WHEN HER TWO DAUGHTERS NEED HER AT THEIR SCHOOL AND FOR EMERGENCIES.

MARGARITE LOST HER JOB BECAUSE SHE HAD TAKEN TOO MANY DAYS OFF TO CARE FOR HER DAUGHTERS.

THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW STANDARDS HAS MADE THE TASK OF MANAGING HOMEWORK MORE COMPLEX.

Margarite works full-time as a temporary employee, earning $5.81/hour. Unlike many other low-wage workers, she is entitled to vacation days, but she never takes them for the purposes of relaxation. Instead, she hoards vacation time and applies it to the days when her two daughters need her at their school and for emergencies. She takes part of her vacation during the first week of school each September so that she can meet with their teachers and visit their classrooms. Margarite refused overtime so that she can come home and do homework with her daughters.[28] Despite these efforts to manage the work/family balance, Margarite's employer simply would not put up with the amount of time she was gone to care for her daughters. Hence, towards the end of our year's fieldwork, Margarite lost her job because she had taken too many days off to care for her daughters.

While she was working, Margarite relied on a babysitter to pick up her daughters after school at a cost of $40 per child per week, a substantial sum for a low wage earner. This babysitter also picked up 8 other girls in addition to her daughters - Elsie and India. The babysitter did not offer to provide any structure for getting the homework done and as a consequence, the daughters did not do any homework until Margarite actually sat down with them at home. Margarite remains the source of order and discipline who instills good homework habits. She is proud of the fact that her daughters get many certificates and awards for their work.

However, the introduction of new standards has made the task of managing homework more complex. There is simply a higher volume of work being assigned that must be squeezed into the same, limited number of evening hours, as our field interviewer could see on one of her routine visits:

> When I arrived, the children were eating. Elsie had completed her homework. India had more to do. She showed me four work sheets that she almost completed and told me that she had more assignments that she completed and put them in her backpack. It seemed to me that India had a lot of homework. I mentioned this to Margarite and she agreed. Margarite asked Elsie for her calendar. Margarite

[28] Her employer allowed her 3 weeks vacation and nine personal days. She had no other regular benefits.

showed me a blank calendar sheet that Elsie's teacher hands out at the beginning of the month. Margarite added the dates for the month of November, filled out Elsie's name and class information, and signed the calendar. Margarite explained that each day every child is supposed to write on her calendar how much time she spent on reading. The total number of hours are added at the end of the month.

No one can question the importance of reading mastery. But it takes no small amount of parental monitoring to reinforce it at home. Moreover, occasionally, Margarite herself has difficulty with the homework problems that her children are assigned. When this happens, the children often skip the problem in hopes that it will be ignored in school. Education is a goal to which Margarite is devoted and is part and parcel of a commitment to her children – alongside their care when they are ill or need to see a dentist. That has now cost her the job she had.

WHEN DEBRA WAS ON WELFARE, SHE WAS A DAILY FIXTURE IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

Debra is a case at the opposite end of the continuum: a mother who was once extremely active in her children's schools, who has now had to privilege her job. When Debra was on welfare, she was a daily fixture in the elementary school. She knew everyone: teachers, administrators, librarians, and fellow devotees of the PTA. She was an officer in the organization, responsible for supporting the school's goals in fundraising, field trips, and the like. She complained about parents who were not as involved as she and complained that they had too little understanding of their children's school lives:

> "Even on the PTA board, the parents are not involved as much as they should. This is a school of 700 kids. Sometimes I have seventeen parents, sometimes I have ten. I'm involved because it's important for parents to get out there and be involved in the school because you don't know what's going on behind the doors. And it started out with me seeing too much negative behind doors is what made me stay here. It's good to know what's behind doors because if I have my baby in a place it's the same as if I had my baby in daycare or if I had my baby with a babysitter. It's the same thing. You got to be there and see the things behind doors because you never know what goes on behind doors."

NOW THAT SHE WORKS FULL TIME AND COMMUTES, DEBRA CANNOT VISIT THE SCHOOL VERY OFTEN.

Now that she works full time and commutes, Debra has had to abandon this activity herself. She cannot visit the school very often, and she depends on her children for information about what goes on "behind doors." Debra still has personal ties to teachers she can trade on if she needs to, but since teachers move around a lot, it is not clear that these ties will be of much value in a year's time.

Beyond the time-squeeze, Debra is simply more tired. At the end of her work day, she commutes from her office in Union Square to her mother-in-law's home in Harlem to pick up her kids and then she commutes home with the 3 kids to Washington Heights. Debra starts her day with that commute in reverse order. When she was a volunteer, she often took care of her two-year-old herself and brought her two older kids back home directly after school. The hectic pace is evident in a speed up on the domestic front, recorded in our fieldnotes:

> As she spoke, she was picking up and arranging the clothes and toys that were lying all over the floor of the apartment. Indeed, because I am used to seeing the apartment in a very neat and clean state when I visit her, I was slightly surprised to see what she described as the "chaotic look" of the living room. She told me that because she now gets up so early, and now comes home rather late, she doesn't have the time that she used to clean the place up anytime she wants to, so she has to do it when she comes home from work. Normally, she does feel tired when she gets home, but after she puts the children to bed (or in their rooms) by 8:30 p.m., she somehow gets some new-found energy for a bit of straightening and arranging before she goes to bed herself.

THE TIME PRESSURE ON THIS SINGLE MOM HAS CAUSED HER TO PRESS HER 10-YEAR-OLD INTO TAKING MORE RESPONSIBILITY FOR HER YOUNGER SIBLINGS. IN OTHER HOUSEHOLDS, THIS CHILD'S TIME WOULD GO TOWARD HOMEWORK AND READING.

The time pressure on this single mom has caused her to press her 10-year-old daughter into taking more responsibility for her younger siblings.[29] It has become the 10-year-olds' routine chore to bathe and diaper her two-year-old sister before bed. In other households, this time would go toward homework and reading. Debra knows that her oldest

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[29] This is consistent with Brooks, Hair and Zaslow's Welfare Reform's Impact on Adolescents study 2001, LynNell Hancock's Hands to Work, NY: William Morris. 2001, and Katherine Boo's "After Welfare," New Yorker, 93-107 April 9, 2001.

daughter needs more academic help. She was left back once already during the third grade and is still having trouble. During our year with her, we saw her daughter and son both struggle with reading. Both children had to attend extra reading support sessions after school so that they could catch up. These sessions were offered for free at the local school. However, with the new job, Debra simply does not have the energy to check homework or to read to them like she used to. She knows how important monitoring is; she believes it is her responsibility; but she can do only so much. She berates herself for these shortcomings:

> Debra said that it wasn't the issue of not being able to help with her child's homework, it was a question of her just "being lazy" about helping her daughter. "...her education still comes first, and I just can't come home saying that I'm tired." She said that she had to "put that tiredness behind me. No matter whether you are tired or not, you can't put nothing else before your child. That's what I realized: I was putting my other needs before my child." She said that she was taking care of them the way she normally does, except for the fact that she was putting her into bed without checking her bag and seeing if she had done her homework. "Sometimes you think your child is okay but they're not okay, because they're lying to you at the same time."

DURING THE PERIOD DEBRA WORKED IN THE WEP JOB ASSIGNED TO HER BY THE TANF OFFICE, SHE BECAME AWARE THAT THE PRESSURES SHE FACED TO STAY ON THE JOB AND TAKE CARE OF HER KIDS' NEEDS AT THE SAME TIME WERE COMMON TO ALL WORKING FAMILIES.

During the period Debra worked in the WEP[30] job assigned to her by the TANF office, she became aware that the pressures she faced to stay on the job and take care of her kids' needs at the same time were common to all working families. She had been sheltered from them during her time in the welfare system and was clearly able to devote herself to the children's wellbeing, including their education. Introducing the element of work has brought her in line with the difficult balancing job that is familiar to most working single mothers.

> "I have to realize that if...I'm working from nine to five like everybody else, I'm coming home to more work. I just have to balance and realize that I can't just do some of things that I want to do. It just made it more harder, but I just realize that life

[30] Work Experience Program (WEP).

doesn't change, 'cause you have to continue to do the same thing...I'm up later and I go to bed early. So you know I'm starting to feel what other people go through...."

DEBRA'S 2-YEAR-OLD'S ROUTINE CONVERSATION IS LIMITED TO A LOUD "SHUT UP!" THE LITTLE ONE SEEMS UNABLE TO ARTICULATE ANYTHING EXCEPT THESE WORDS, WHICH LEADS THE OBSERVER TO WONDER WHAT SHE IS EXPERIENCING DURING THE LONG HOURS OF DAY CARE AT HER GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE.

The task is not made easier by certain behavioral problems that are cropping up inside the household, at least partly in response to Debra's absence. She says that the kids are becoming more unruly. They are not under her supervision for as many hours in the day as they were once accustomed to and are starting to "run wild," in her judgment. Her 2-year-old is clearly in difficulty. This child's routine conversation is limited to a loud "Shut up!" The little one seems unable to articulate anything except these words, which leads the observer to wonder what she is experiencing during the long hours of day care at her Grandmother's house, where drug addicts are known to wander in and out. This is the best Debra can do in the way of child care since her income is so low, but she too has noticed that the baby is developing problems. She responds to the trouble in her house with what she regards as appropriate discipline, but which middle-class observers find rather harsh:

> I had to wind them down about fifteen minutes before you came...they are kinda gettin off the hook, so I have to pull my strap out....But everything is pretty fine." I asked her how her weekend went, and she said that it was "pretty nice and quiet," but she said that she had to put her children back on "some type of discipline" because they are more out of control.

DEBRA IS GENUINELY PLEASED ABOUT HAVING A REGULAR JOB AND FEELS LESS DEPRESSED, MORE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT HER FUTURE. AT THE SAME TIME, SHE IS STRUGGLING WITH A DIMINISHED ABILITY TO MONITOR HER CHILDREN.

Debra is genuinely pleased about having a regular job and seems considerably happier as an individual adult with her circumstances. She is out of the house, away from her kids, earning a living, earning respect. As someone who has struggled with serious problems of depression and abuse during her married life, both the WEP job and the permanent position that followed on its heels have been a genuine blessing. She feels less depressed, she is more optimistic about her future. At the same time, she is struggling with a diminished ability to monitor her children:

> Debra says that she "is not going to let no job come between her and her children." She said that at her job, she is near a telephone. If she gets a call from

the school saying that her children are "acting up" she will go down to the school to chastise them. "I'm coming with my strap to knock them out," she said, "and one has to remind children of that fact."

The telephone is a poor substitute for first-hand contact, but it is a measure of her sense of obligation and her frustration at rebellion that she believes this will be an effective means of ensuring obedience. Moreover, the positive impact of working cannot offset the problems that may be developing in Debra's toddler, whose day care circumstances are compromising her linguistic and possibly cognitive development. Indeed, Debra's case represents what we believe will be true of many families who have transitioned off of welfare: parents will do better because they will be working, earning more money, and falling into line with the general cultural expectations of responsible adulthood. Children will undoubtedly reap some benefits because their parents will be less depressed and more optimistic. At the same time, children will see less of their parents, will lose the benefits of parental involvement in school, and will undoubtedly experience less monitoring on the home front (including at homework time) because of the exhaustion factor. In the most problematic of cases, this results in kids being held back as the standards rise and in diminishing "inputs" on the home side.

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF WORKING CANNOT OFFSET THE PROBLEMS THAT MAY BE DEVELOPING IN DEBRA'S TODDLER, WHOSE DAY CARE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE COMPROMISING HER LINGUISTIC AND POSSIBLY COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT.

Margarite exemplifies a trade-off situation "resolved" (at least temporarily) in favor of the family. Debra is at the other end of the continuum: her time has shifted into the work world and even by her own standards she is shortchanging her kids.

Leena and Nina, two other mothers in our study, have come down on the same side as Debra, but have always been in this bind and have never had the time or energy to pay much attention to their children's academic performance. Leena and Nina both have full time jobs that require set hours. Neither of them ever volunteered in their children's school. Leena works long hours and attends night school, and Nina works nights so much of her daytime hours are spent recuperating.

Leena is one of our most upwardly mobile parents who was formerly on welfare. She was able to attend college and learn computer skills while she was on public assistance. Her

experience at college and in a work study program landed her a very good job in a medical office, where she is a very valued and skilled employee. On her own, she developed the patient scheduling system that the office relies on and she is the only person who is fully capable of using it. Hence, when Leena is on vacation or otherwise absent, fewer patients get scheduled and the office makes less money. Having seen the options her skills have opened up for her, Leena is determined to pursue even more education. She is going to night school to complete her bachelor's degree.

LEENA FEELS THAT SHE NEEDS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY SHE HAS TO MOVE UP AND OUT OF THE WORKING POOR.

Leena feels that she needs to take advantage of every opportunity she has to move up and out of the working poor. After so many years of being on welfare, she is pushing herself into the middle-class, by upgrading her furniture, her clothes and even buying some nice things for her sons. She has been able to devote this much time to increasing her standard of living because she was able to rely on the support of her mother, who came from the Dominican Republic to take care of Leena's children. This has been a tremendous boon as a babysitting solution, but it is not working well as an academic support structure now that the standards are winching up. Leena's Spanish speaking, poorly educated mother is not able to provide good homework help for her children. Henry, Leena's son, is in trouble academically. While Henry was not held back in this particular year, his teachers told Leena that he was a candidate for failing the reading and math exams and encouraged her to get tutors for her son.

LEENA'S SPANISH-SPEAKING, POORLY EDUCATED MOTHER IS NOT ABLE TO PROVIDE GOOD HOMEWORK HELP FOR HER CHILDREN.

HENRY HAD ONLY BEEN DOING HOMEWORK TWO DAYS A WEEK – THOSE DAYS HE SPENDS IN A FREE AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM THAT GIVES HIM EXTRA READING HELP.

Henry had only been doing homework two days a week—those days he spends in a free after school program that gives him extra reading help. On other days, he doesn't do his homework. Neither Leena nor her mother checks his homework. While Leena knows this is wrong, she often gets home from night school at 10 p.m., long past her kids' bedtime and so allows Henry to go to school the next day without completing his work. Because she depends upon her mother, a somewhat fragile arrangement, Leena does not feel she can be too heavy handed about what goes on in her absence, as our fieldnotes suggest:

> Leena feels fortunate that her mother lives with her and takes care of her children. However, she cannot tell her mother how she should raise her children—even to get them to do their homework and to read

with them. Mickey, her younger son, will be tougher to raise because he is spoiled. Mickey has been raised with her mother and her mother satisfies all of his wishes.

LEENA DOES NOT HAVE THE MONEY TO GET TUTORS OR BETTER AFTER SCHOOL CARE FOR HER OLDER SON, NOR DOES SHE HAVE MONEY TO PUT HER YOUNGER SON IN A CHILDCARE CENTER WHERE HE MIGHT DEVELOP BETTER HABITS.

Leena does not have the money to get tutors or better after school care for her older son, nor does she have money to put her younger son in a childcare center where he might develop better habits. She would love the kids to be able to learn a musical instrument but money, time, and logistical arrangements prohibit it. Leena's mother takes care of the both of them, and she cannot take the younger one around with her just to get the older one tutoring or music lessons. In addition, any program that accepts Leena's 8-year-old son would not normally take in her younger 2-year-old son as well.

THE SCHOOL STILL ASSUMES THAT PARENTS HAVE DAYTIME HOURS AVAILABLE, SETTING PARENT-TEACHER MEETING TIMES DURING SCHOOLDAY HOURS. TO PICK UP REPORT CARDS, ONE MUST GO DURING SCHOOL HOURS. LEENA HAD PUT THAT DUTY OFF UNTIL SHE COULD LEAVE WORK TO GET TO THE SCHOOL. AS A CONSEQUENCE, SHE IS NOT ENTIRELY SURE HOW HENRY IS DOING IN SCHOOL.

Leena works a full 9-to-5 schedule that cannot be altered, so she has not been around her son's school. Leena does not know the teachers, the principal or guidance counselor at Henry's school. There is no one at the school to look out for Henry. While Leena receives official warning notices when Henry gets into trouble, she does not have any advanced notice that problems are cropping up, nor does she know any of the adults in the school personally who might help her sort the difficulties out. The school still assumes that parents have daytime hours available, setting parent-teacher meeting times during schoolday hours. To pick up report cards, one must go during school hours. Leena had put that duty off until she could leave work to get to the school. As a consequence, she is not entirely sure how Henry is doing in school. She does know that he is not perfectly behaved, because she hears from the school about that. They want her help in setting him straight:

> Henry received his second notice for misbehaving in the lunch room. Leena pulled out the school letter. The school letter is a list of the rules during lunch: no talking, no shouting or yelling, must follow teacher's directions, and so on. Attached to the school letter, there was a handwritten note in Spanish that stated that Henry was misbehaving and that if he receives another warning his mother will have to come to school and sit with him at lunch. The note also asked Leena to sign it. Henry said he violated the rule of no talking/yelling. Henry said

that the teachers do not want anyone to say anything. Leena explained to Henry that she cannot miss a day of work because he cannot behave during lunch.

WHILE LEENA UNDERSTANDS THE ACADEMIC PROBLEMS THAT HER SON HAS, SHE ONLY HAS LIMITED TIME RESOURCES TO ADDRESS THEM IF SHE IS GOING TO KEEP HERSELF ON AN ESCALATOR OF UPWARD MOBILITY.

While Leena understands the academic problems that her son has, she only has limited time resources to address them if she is going to keep herself on an escalator of upward mobility. Leena is not around the school and not plugged into the neighborhood youth programs. Instead, she recruits family members to work with Henry, in order to economize financially and avoid logistical headaches.

> While I was in the bedroom talking with Leena, Victor, Leena's brother, was in the living room helping Henry learn his multiplication tables. Victor took a break and came in the bedroom. I called him professor and asked him how the lessons were coming along. He said that it is taking longer than he expected. He thought that Henry would pick up the tables much quicker. Victor exited the bedroom and went back to the living room to continue the lessons. When Henry came in the bedroom, I asked him which tables he knows. He said that he needs to learn the 6, 7, 8, and 9 tables.

At the end of this school year, Leena's son passed his third grade exams - but just barely and with a lot of support. Without the free after school reading support that Henry received, he would have been at a total loss. Henry did not become one of the statistics reported on grade retention, but he is clearly at risk for the future.

Thus, Leena is in both a time and financial bind like many other parents. She does not have the financial resources to provide the extra help or formal child care that Henry and Mickey might require during the day or after school. She herself cannot volunteer time, nor can she go to her son's school meetings on a regular basis to provide some face time. Even in the evenings, she does not have the time to oversee her son's homework in the way the Board of Education wants her to.

There can be little doubt that Leena is advancing herself in the labor market and is enhancing the human capital she needs to do even better in the future. Her children benefit

THERE IS A GREAT DEAL LESS STRESS IN THE HOUSEHOLD IN TERMS OF ECONOMIC SECURITY THAN THERE WAS WHEN LEENA WAS ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE. HOWEVER, THE CHOICES SHE HAS MADE TO PULL HERSELF UP BY HER OWN BOOTSTRAPS HAVE LEFT HER TIME POOR AND UNABLE TO PULL HER CHILDREN UP AFTER HER, AT LEAST IN AN EDUCATIONAL SENSE.

in many ways from the efforts she is making to increase their standard of living. There is a great deal less stress in the household in terms of economic insecurity than there was when Leena was on public assistance. However, the choices she has made to pull herself up by her own bootstraps have left her time poor and unable to pull her children up after her, at least in an educational sense. She has already escaped working poverty, given her promotions in the doctor's office. But high stakes testing may seal her children's fate and set them on a pathway that will look more like the one Leena started out on as a single mother than the one she has ended up on as a success story.

Nina, formerly on welfare, is now a full-time night-shift employee of the Long Island Railroad. She leaves her 6-year-old adopted son (actually her grand-nephew) in the care of her 14-year-old daughter when she is at work. Occasionally she can rely on the additional help of her niece, the boy's troubled mother, who still comes around.

But this support structure is bare bones and leaves the son, Orion, more or less on his own in terms of school work.

> She said that Orion is doing fair, okay: "could be doing better." I asked her a yes or no question: was her niece helping her son with the homework, to which her reply was no. Nina has to help him. I asked her how does that make her feel. She said that it upsets her, because she "like to get to sleep and do what I have to do, and I don't want to wake up and do homework and all of that." But if she wants the homework done, she will have to be the one that helps him.

Nina works in a job where there is little flexibility. Nina has been a parent through the elementary school system for her daughter. Nina admits that she is not that thrilled about having to go though the struggles with homework and PTA all over again for Orion. She thought that she was finally moving on...and finally able to think about herself and her own needs. She thought that with a little bit of money she could save, she would be able to buy a place for herself. Nina, like the others, enjoys work and feel much more self-assured. However, she worries about her daughter and her new son. Her son is only in first grade and doesn't have much homework yet. However, she already feels that she might

NINA'S SON IS ONLY IN FIRST GRADE AND DOESN'T HAVE MUCH HOMEWORK YET. HOWEVER, SHE ALREADY FEELS THAT SHE MIGHT NOT HAVE THE ENERGY TO DEVOTE TO HIM.

not have the energy to devote to him. Nina had wanted her niece to help when she lived with her temporarily, however she didn't. She felt that she barely had enough time and energy for her daughter's middle school academic needs.

Even though Nina has never been that active in the schools as a volunteer, she did at one point understand the school system better. She knew how to maneuver to get her daughter Tiffany into a better public school system in Park Slope than the one she was assigned to in Fort Greene. When Tiffany was younger, Nina also had the time to runaround and get all the paperwork done for the transfer. The Park Slope school was a good school with lots of money, and in her words, "less likely to put children in Special Education classes." However, since she started working two years ago, she hasn't been in touch with the high schools and their application process. Just recently, Tiffany was placed in a high school that Nina believes is substandard. At this point, Nina has a wait-and-see attitude regarding Tiffany's school.

NO ONE IS PAYING MUCH ATTENTION TO NINA'S SON'S SCHOOL WORK.

On the other hand, Orion has been extremely resilient. He was sent to Nina's house when he was two because his legs and arms were broken by his stepfather. Since he moved in, Orion's real mother has visited a few times. Nina had hoped that she would be the one who could help Orion with his homework, but this proved unreliable. Hence, no one is paying much attention to the boy's school work. While Nina cares about the boy, she is now more invested in the money she can earn in her LIRR job, in the "main chance" it offers her to improve her standard of living. When her daughter Tiffany was Orion's age, and Nina was on welfare, she was "on her toes" in looking out for Tiffany. These days she has "done the right thing" in providing her nephew with a home, but she is not willing to make him her highest priority. She got the message from welfare reform that working should be her major focus and that is fine with her.

Leena and Nina are both single mothers; hence, the strain between work and family demands is more difficult to balance. We have two married women in our sample - Olena and Elisa - who might be expected to manage with less difficulty. However, both have children who have experienced problems in the early grades of elementary school; they do not seem to have been able to deal with them any better than the single mothers. These two wives are both native Spanish speakers, though Olena speaks English

well, and works as a para-professional in a local public school in Brooklyn. She is taking night classes to complete her undergraduate degree. Elisa, on the other hand, does not speak English well and prefers to converse in Spanish. Both women were on welfare and left it before time limits came into existence.

Although Olena is married, her husband is not around very much. Therefore, Olena is the main person responsible for the care of their daughter, Laura. Like most of the other workers in our study, Olena's work hours are inflexible, but they more closely match the schedule Laura maintains in school. The mother's work holidays match Laura's exactly. Moreover, her job provides her with a special "in" around the school system, for she knows teachers and administrators as coworkers and has a better understanding than most of the "workarounds" that help a parent navigate the public school bureaucracy. Olena believes she has done everything she could to keep her daughter on track. But it did not work.

OLENA COULD NOT PERSONALLY MONITOR HER DAUGHTER'S HOMEWORK, IN PART BECAUSE SHE WAS IN NIGHT SCHOOL.

Olena feels bad that she hasn't been able to help her daughter any more than she could. She herself could not personally monitor her daughter's homework, in part because she is in night school. It was not clear to us that she saw this as her obligation in any case. Like many other parents we studied, she genuinely wanted her daughter to succeed, but did not translate this desire into extra parental assistance with homework. Hence, Laura was doing homework on her own. Olena knows that reading every night is important, but many months go by without her setting aside the time for this purpose. Olena did find a special after school program in order to get homework assistance and reading tutoring. However, for Laura, this came too little, too late: Laura was held back in second grade.

OLENA DID FIND A SPECIAL AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM IN ORDER TO GET HOMEWORK ASSISTANCE AND READING TUTORING. HOWEVER, FOR LAURA, THIS CAME TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE: LAURA WAS HELD BACK IN SECOND GRADE.

Overwhelmed: Children and Parents Losing Ground

Most of the families discussed in the section on "trade-offs," are doing what they can to balance the demands of adult work and children's school, though not with much success. Some are erring on the side of their children, and paying a price in terms of economic security. Others are privileging work in order to keep a roof over their families' heads, and are encountering varying degrees of problems in their kids' school lives. It must be said, as well, that some

MOST OF THE FAMILIES DISCUSSED IN THE SECTION ON "TRADE-OFFS" ARE DOING WHAT THEY CAN TO BALANCE THE DEMANDS OF ADULT WORK AND CHILDREN'S SCHOOL, THOUGH NOT WITH MUCH SUCCESS.

have given up trying to balance: they have put occupational advancement, educational credentials for the adults, and economic security above their children's schooling. They hope to see genuine upward mobility for the whole family come out of the bargain. This may prove to be the right move in terms of parental income and even family stability. What is worrisome are the educational problems of the next generation, which may prove the undoing of the family's long term, inter-generational economic trajectory as these kids fall behind in school. Leena may do brilliantly in the doctor's office, but if her son is held back because he cannot read, it will not be a simple matter for him to follow in her footsteps when he reaches maturity.

LEENA MAY DO BRILLIANTLY IN HER WORK AT THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE, BUT IF HER SON IS HELD BACK BECAUSE HE CANNOT READ, IT WILL NOT BE A SIMPLE MATTER FOR HIM TO FOLLOW IN HER FOOTSTEPS WHEN HE REACHES MATURITY.

There is a third outcome, which we hesitate to call a strategy or adaptation because it is so chaotic. It comes about when mothers are unable to secure steady work, are overwhelmed by family demands, are unable to enlist much help from their husbands, and are limited by their own educational limitations to the point where they cannot do much that is constructive to help their children in school. Here we see no trade-offs; instead we see someone treading water at the best of times and drowning for the rest.

Elisa is a case in point. She had been on and off welfare for about 10 years when we began our fieldwork. She is the only one we followed who did not receive a high school diploma. Elisa has three children, Calvin (14), Willie (8), and Anthony (5). She is the most overwhelmed of all the parents in our study. With three children to look after, the youngest of whom has experienced some developmental delays as a consequence of lead poisoning, she is often at wits' end and has little help from anyone to rely on.

ELISA IS AN "OLD SCHOOL" DOMINICAN WHOSE CULTURE DEFINES TEACHERS AS EXPERTS AND DICTATES THAT PARENTS SHOULD NOT INTERFERE.

Elisa is an "old school" Dominican whose culture defines teachers as experts and dictates that parents should not interfere. She cannot easily verify the information that her children give her about what is required of them in school, and she does not want to appear as though she is challenging anyone's authority. Elisa has almost no understanding of how a bureaucracy works. She completed very little schooling in the Dominican Republic, can barely read in Spanish, and reads no English at all. Elisa does go with her children when she discovers they are having trouble in school and during the year of our fieldwork, she spent many an hour with Spanish speaking guidance counselors trying to salvage her

oldest son's school career. However, she has been entirely unable to make a difference. His teachers complained that he was failing to do his homework. Elisa has little sense of how much time it takes to complete homework. She can see whether the books are open, but not whether the written work is properly completed.

ELISA IS DISTRACTED BY FINANCIAL WORRIES AND RECEIVES HARASSING LETTERS FROM PUBLIC AGENCIES CHALLENGING HER BENEFITS.

Elisa is distracted by financial worries and receives harassing letters from public agencies challenging her benefits. When we first began our fieldwork, Elisa was on public assistance and received SSI for her oldest son who was diagnosed as ADD. In one sense, she had more time to look after her kids during this period, though in reality she had to devote a great deal of effort and psychic energy to retaining those benefits. Nonetheless, when she was not standing on line to correct a paperwork error in the TANF office or waiting patiently for help in resolving a rent dispute with her landlord, Elisa was able to walk her children to school and occasionally chat with some of the Spanish-speaking teachers. She was not frantic in the evening trying to get her children to do their work, though she was also unable to oversee it very effectively.

WHEN SHE IS "IN WORK," ELISA COMMUTES ALMOST THREE HOURS A DAY, MOST RECENTLY TO A JOB PACKING PERFUME BOTTLES IN A FACTORY IN NEW JERSEY, FOR WHICH SHE WAS PAID LESS THAN $4 AN HOUR.

Periodically during the next year, Elisa secured under-the-table jobs, primarily in factories that hire illegal and undocumented workers. During our fieldwork she was hired in 2 to 3 contracting shops. When she is "in work," Elisa commutes almost three hours a day, most recently to a job packing perfume bottles in a factory in New Jersey, for which she was paid less than $4 an hour, considerably below the legal minimum wage. But with welfare benefits terminating, it was her only option. When she is working, Elisa has little time left over or energy to help her children by structuring their lives. Her kids are often up at 11 p.m. without completing their homework. This leads to great frustration as Elisa reaches the end of her tether:

> It was almost ten o'clock and neither boy had started his homework. Elisa became really angry and got a belt and hit Willie who was in the living room and then went into the kitchen and hit Anthony. About 15 minutes later, she hit Willie again because he still had not brought his homework to her. Marta, Elisa's sister, mentions that every evening it is a regular tug-of-war to get the boys to do their homework.

ELISA KNEW SHE SHOULD GO TO CALVIN'S SCHOOL TO TRY TO HELP STRAIGHTEN THINGS OUT, AS SHE HAD DONE IN THE PAST, BUT THIS WOULD HAVE PUT HER JOB AT RISK.

ELISA IS THE TRADITIONAL PARENT, WHO LOOKS TO THE SCHOOL FOR GUIDANCE, AND DOES NOT FEEL COMFORTABLE CHALLENGING DECISIONS MADE BY THE SCHOOL ON BEHALF OF HER BOYS.

Elisa is limited in her capacity to understand what her children are going through in school. For example, her middle son tells her that he is doing well in school, but his third grade report card says otherwise. Her oldest son, Calvin, embarrassed about being put in a special education class, forged her signature to get himself out of it and promptly found himself in regular classes in which he floundered for the rest of the year. At the end of our fieldwork year, he passed into eighth grade, to the surprise of virtually everyone as he had failed to do his homework throughout seventh grade. During the next academic year, he was so lost and in trouble that he dropped out. Elisa knew she should go to his school to try to help straighten things out, as she had done in the past, but this would have put her job at risk.

Calvin's school, a middle school in a Dominican neighborhood of the Upper West Side of Manhattan, is on double sessions because of massive overcrowding. Students are easily lost in the shuffle, particularly if their parents cannot advocate on their behalf. Yet Elisa is unsure how to go about it. She is the traditional parent, who looks to the school for guidance, and does not feel comfortable challenging decisions made by the school on behalf of her boys.

An example from our fieldnotes helps to illustrate the difficulties Elisa has in sustaining her younger son's attachment to a favored teacher when he is moved out of the class by mistake:

> Elisa likes Anthony's teacher. Elisa remembers that her niece left the same kindergarten reading. The teacher speaks and teaches more in English than in Spanish. The teacher gives homework in Spanish but teaches the basic in English. Elisa feels that this teacher is beneficial for Anthony. But Elisa is not sure if Anthony will remain with the same teacher. The teacher sent all of Anthony's materials home and told Elisa that Anthony was assigned to the wrong kindergarten class. There are two kindergarten teachers with the same last name. Anthony was sent to the wrong class. Elisa does not want Anthony to change teachers because he has already developed a relationship with this teacher. Even though the teacher has sent all of Anthony's materials home [indicating he should transfer to the right teacher], she continues to teach him for now. Elisa is not sure

how the situation will end. I asked Elisa if she will need to go to school. She said she cannot because she has to work. She asked her husband to go to school. I asked Elisa if he is going. She said yes. I told Elisa that she should do this before the change occurs. After the change, it may be difficult to get the school to reverse its decision.

It is not clear to Elisa that she can rely on her husband to manage the situation at school. Nor is it evident to Elisa exactly what she would have to do to keep her son with the teacher he likes.

BEFORE ELISA WENT BACK TO WORK, A MOVE URGED BY THE TANF OFFICE, SHE WAS MORE ORGANIZED, LESS FRAZZLED, AND HAD THE TIME TO VISIT HER CHILDREN'S SCHOOLS, EVEN IF IT WAS A PROSPECT SHE DID NOT RELISH.

It might be suggested that Elisa's own limited human capital would best explain the difficulties her children are encountering in school. There is truth to this observation, of course. She cannot guide their homework, read to them, correct them when they make mistakes or in any way supplement their instruction. Elisa cannot even read the directions on their homework. However, before Elisa went back to work, a move urged by the TANF office, she was more organized, less frazzled, and had the time to visit their schools, even if it was a prospect she did not relish. Elisa was better able to structure her children's days when her own days did not begin at 6am and end at 7pm. For in addition to the full work day, she has a long commute to the factory. The time between her arrival at home in the evening and the very end of the day is packed with obligation and no time to rest. Her capacity to manage, to get dinner on the table and the children bathed, is stretched to the limit. This leaves little time for any gestures in the direction of the pleadings from the Board of Education about parental "coaching" of school children.

Needed: Policy Responses that Support Both Children and Families

THE STAKES ARE VERY HIGH FOR CHILDREN IN WORKING POOR FAMILIES, BECAUSE IF THEY FALL BEHIND AND GET LEFT BACK, THEIR TRAJECTORIES FOR THE REST OF THEIR SCHOOL CAREERS MAY BE IN JEOPARDY.

We have outlined some of the emerging patterns among working poor families as they encounter the demands of welfare reform and the increasing requirements of the school system. The stakes are very high for their children because if they fall behind and get left back, their trajectories for the rest of their school careers may be in jeopardy. Schools, too, feel the pressure to increase student mastery and for good reason.

THE NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM HAS ADDED RESOURCES INTO SUMMER SCHOOL AND REMEDIAL EDUCATION IN THE EARLY GRADES, IN AN ATTEMPT TO PROVIDE MORE TIME ON-TASK THAT CHILDREN IN THESE FAMILIES REQUIRE.

WE DO NOT YET HAVE THE DATA ON GRADE RETENTION AFTER MANDATORY SUMMER SCHOOL TO KNOW HOW MUCH OF A REMEDY THIS WILL PROVIDE.

A number of policy responses are emerging in the wake of these cross-pressures. First, the New York City School system has added resources into summer school and remedial education in the early grades, in an attempt to provide more time on-task that children in these families require. Given the inequalities that put families on uneven terrain rather than level playing fields, this is a critical part of the solution.[31] Indeed, these may be the only interventions that can genuinely make up for the things that parents cannot do at home. Yet it is not clear that this will be enough. Children who fall behind during the regular school year, and have basic problems in reading and math, may not be able to pass the high stakes tests. Time will tell: we do not yet have the data on grade retention after mandatory summer school to know how much of a remedy this will provide.

THE SECOND POLICY RESPONSE, WHICH IS MORE UNEVEN IN ITS AVAILABILITY, IS TO TRANSFORM AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS FROM "DAY CARE" TO EDUCATIONAL REMEDIATION AND ENRICHMENT.

The second policy response, which is more uneven in its availability, is to transform after school programs from "day care" to educational remediation and enrichment. The largest provider of free "after school" care in the New York City area is The After school Corporation (TASC). Children who are enrolled usually sign a contract to maintain good attendance.[32] The programs were initially sponsored by the Open Society Institute and community arts groups that use

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[31] Barbara Heyns discusses the importance of summer school especially for disadvantaged youth, because it allowed them to practice reading and math skills. For disadvantaged youth, this prevented backsliding and reinforced skills they learned during the school year. Summer Learning and the Effects of Schooling. New York: Academic Press 1978.

[32] See www.tascorp.org

WHILE ALL THE AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND HAVE A HOMEWORK COMPONENT, THEY ARE NOT DESIGNED FOR EDUCATIONAL REMEDIATION. THEY ARE ALSO OVERSUBSCRIBED.

school buildings for the programs. While all the programs are free and have a homework component, they are not designed for educational remediation. They are also oversubscribed and have staff members to keep kids safe and to help kids do their homework. Program developers also wanted a place where urban children could get an arts and cultural experience, which they would not be getting in the regular public school classroom.

TASC after school programs started in 1999, and they have proliferated since. They are an important source of support in a "high-stakes testing" environment. Encouraging kids to do their homework is a huge start; having someone who can help with homework is another added benefit, especially for kids who do not have parents who speak English or are unable to comprehend the homework. However, none of the kids in our study attended these types of programs during our fieldwork, and it is unclear whether programs are attracting students at risk for poor test scores.

IT IS UNCLEAR WHETHER AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS ARE ATTRACTING STUDENTS AT RISK FOR POOR TEST SCORES.

Some of the kids in our ethnographic sample were enrolled in remediation programs provided by their school to strengthen their reading skills. These were a significant benefit to them. However, limited funds were available for these programs, which are supported by the New York City Board of Education budget, which expands and contracts with fiscal policies. The consequences of the 9/11 tragedy in New York have put a significant strain on the City's budget, leaving many districts unable to afford these "extras."[33] It would appear, at least anecdotally, that only those schools with extra funds from their PTA fundraising drives have been able to retain remediation programs.

THERE HAS BEEN NO SYSTEMATIC STUDY OF THE EXISTING REMEDIATION PROGRAMS SINCE THE ONSET OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING AND THE END OF SOCIAL PROMOTION.

There has been no systematic study of the existing remediation programs since the onset of high-stakes testing and the end of social promotion. If the experience of the children in our very small sample is any guide, these after school programs are modestly helpful. Some of "our" kids were able to scrape by the third grade tests with the help of these after school programs, and others were not. It would seem imperative to ramp up the educational efforts through these programs, but that is costly and requires policy commitments from the New York City Board of

[33] New York Times, "Middle-Class Parents Say Schools Have Been Cut to the Bone." February 15, 2002.

FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN, UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS IS ESSENTIAL.

WORKPLACE POLICIES THAT ENABLE LOW-INCOME FAMILIES TO HAVE ACCESS TO FAMILY LEAVES, VACATIONS, SICK LEAVE, OR EVEN FLEXIBLE HOURS ARE CRITICAL.

IRREGULAR SCHEDULES AND EVENING WORK HOURS ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROBLEMS PARENTS HAVE IN MEETING THEIR CHILDREN'S TEACHERS, MONITORING HOMEWORK, AND HELPING WITH EARLY READING SKILLS.

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM HAS STRESSED THE CRITICAL ROLE OF PARENTS IN SUPPORTING THE BASIC EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN.

AT THE SAME TIME, PARENTS ARE TOLD – AND THE MESSAGE IS REINFORCED IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS – THAT THEY MUST PUT THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THEIR HOUSEHOLDS FIRST.

THEIR CHILDREN ARE PAYING SOME OF THE PRICE.

Education and the private sector. For younger children, universal access to Prekindergarten programs is essential. Much of the childcare used by low-income families may not provide the academic concepts that now seem essential for entering Kindergarten students. Considering increased standards at all levels of schooling and the lack of good basic early childhood education, there should be an assessment of the New York State Universal Prekindergarten initiative. Three aspects need to be examined: are children "at risk" enrolling in these programs? What are the children learning in these programs? Is the curriculum consistent with the new standards implemented in the New York City public school system?

In light of the time poverty documented in this paper, we believe that workplace policies that enable low-income families to have more time together are critical. Low-income families are less likely to have access to family leaves, vacations, sick leave, or even flexible hours that more advantaged families have, in spending time with their children. In low-income work, employers need to develop policies that allow parents to have some kind of flexibility to meet situations that arise during work hours. Moreover, shift work is exceptionally hard on low-income parents; we have known that for some time. We believe that irregular schedules and evening work hours are contributing to the problems parents have in meeting with their children's teachers, monitoring homework, and helping with early reading skills.

In addition, the school system has stressed the critical role of parents in supporting the basic education of their children. Deluged by flyers, besieged by teachers, parents are being told that it is up to them to see to it that their youngsters are prepared to take the tests. As this paper has shown, there are limits to how far this strategy can take us. This is especially true for parents who are immigrants with limited English skills and little experience with large bureaucracies. At the same time, parents are told – and the message is reinforced in no uncertain terms – that they must put the financial support of their households first. Some defy this message and lose their jobs to help their kids. But they are not likely to pursue that option for long. When the rent comes due and the TANF checks stop, they will have to find their way into the workforce, whatever the cost to

their children.[34] Most of the families in this study have already made this trade-off and, with the exception of the "monitors," their children are paying some of the price.

[34] Kathryn Edin, E. Scott, A. London, and J. Mazelis have argued that women on welfare are keenly aware of the choice point between their children's safety and their capacity to work. They are most resistant to the demand that they work when they live in crime-ridden neighborhoods and worry about their children's safety. Success in school seems less immediate; hence, parents may feel they have to back burner school performance in favor of their own work in ways they might not be willing to sacrifice when it is a question of physical safety: in Kathryn Edin, E. Scott, A. London, and J. Mazelis, "My Children Come First: Welfare Reliant Women's Post-TANF Views of Work-Family Trade-Offs, Neighborhood, and Marriage." In P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale and Gregg Duncan, Eds., *For Better and For Worse: Welfare Reform and the Well-Being of Children and Families*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press, 2002.

Table 1. Comparative Characteristics of the New York Survey and Qualitative Samples

	New York Survey (n=900)	Qualitative sub-Sample (n=100)
Average Age	44.2	43.6
Gender (%male)	50.6	41.8
Ethnicity		
% Black	37.6	34.7
% Dominican	31.1	33.7
% Puerto Rican	31.3	31.6
Employment Status (1995)		
% currently employed	45.9	52.1
% currently unemployed	11.9	8.2
Immigrant Status		
% US born	53.2	53.1
% immigrated <18 yrs old	10.4	9.2
% immigrated 18+ yrs old	28.7	27.5
Mean Neighborhood Income	$27, 306	$27,016
Public Aid		
% receiving AFDC in household (1995)		
African Americans		15
Puerto Ricans		27
Dominicans		22
% receiving SSI in household		
African Americans		15
Puerto Ricans		24
Dominicans		22

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